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April 27, 1880.

No. 24. VOL. I.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS, 98 WILLIAM ST., N. Y.

PRICE, 5 CENTS.



ISABELLE.

Her Face Was Her Fortune.

BY ELEANOR BLAINE.

CHAPTER I.

GUY FENTON.

A BRIGHT, clear, sunny afternoon melting into twilight—that was the time; and the scene was Albemarle Villa, half-hidden by tall clustering beeches.

Two ladies standing at a window, waiting for an expected guest.

Guy Fenton arrived late, just before dinner; and after hastily changing his dress he entered the drawing-room where Mr. Arnsdale, the owner, stood, awaiting his appearance.

"Very glad to see you, Guy," he said, advancing with a smile. "Very glad you've come up to this dreary place again."

"Thanks, uncle; there's nothing gives me more pleasure than to throw aside my law-briefs and take a trip to quiet little Albemarle."

"You look a little worn out, Guy. Is business brisk?"

"Well, yes; just now our court calendar is pretty well crowded."

"Here are the ladies!"

The door opened and Laura Arnsdale and Miss Evelyn, her governess, came in.

Guy Fenton turned around from the window. His glance fell upon the governess. He saw a plain dress, but a wonderfully beautiful girl, and he made way for her as for a princess. There is an impulse, not of admiration simply, but of respect in our first sight of a beautiful woman; because we intuitively reverence power of every kind, and beauty in a woman is power. The momentary scene was fixed in his mind forever. He had cause, afterward, to remember how that figure and face appeared to him, for the first time, in the shadow of that quaint little drawing-room.

"Miss Evelyn, cousin Guy," said Laura.

Guy Fenton approached, smiling, and took her hand deferentially, and told her that he had heard a great deal about Miss Evelyn from his cousin, and was very happy to make her acquaintance.

Isabelle Evelyn liked his manner very much; she felt that she was treated like a person of consequence, and as one worth pleasing.

A tall, graceful man of twenty-six or seven years of age. His face decidedly handsome with its dark blue eyes and classic modeling. His hair chestnut and curling in loose tendrils brushed carelessly back from a broad, high forehead. And pervading his features a winning charm of expression, a subtle fascination.

Such was Miss Evelyn's mental description of Guy Fenton as she and Laura strolled along the lawn after dinner, while Mr. Arnsdale and his nephew sat sipping their wine.

"Miss Evelyn is rather a pretty girl, uncle?" said Guy, leaning back in his chair, and holding up his glass, filled with choice old sherry, so that the light might shine through it.

"Miss Evelyn?" repeated Mr. Arnsdale. "Oh! yes; very well, very pretty indeed."

"She has a superior education, too, I should say," added Guy, still gazing idly at the wine.

"Yes, yes, her manner shows it—quite a wonderful creature, indeed!"

Mr. Arnsdale's solitude at Albemarle Villa had given him careless habits of soliloquizing, and as Guy glanced sharply into his eyes he would have given something to have recalled his last words.

"Where did you say she came from, uncle?"

"I advertised for a governess—you know Laura was very lonely last April after her mother died—and Miss Evelyn answered the advertisement. She came from the city, quite highly recommended."

"From some of your acquaintances, I suppose?"

"No, some people that live in Madison Avenue, I think. They were out of town at the time, and I didn't take the trouble to hunt them up."

"She's quite young—not much older than Laura, I should say."

"Yes. She's more of a companion than an instructress to Laura."

Finishing his wine and leaving his uncle to enjoy a quiet nap, Guy Fenton went out to smoke his cigar and take a look about the place, for he had not been at Albermarle for the space of five months.

The low evening sun shone up from the western horizon, and flooded the air with splendor. From glittering ivy, from thickets, from the discolored foliage of lofty boughs, the birds sung out their vesper lays and glorified the coming hour of rest.

Guy Fenton was a man of refined taste and endowed with a sense of the beautiful, and these scenes, enchanted by the twilight hour, thrilled him.

"How can they call this place dreary?" he said, looking down at the river whose surface was unruffled and reflected every object near, like a polished mirror. "If I only possessed such a home and had such a woman for a—"

The rest of this sentence was cut short by the appearance of Laura and Isabelle Evelyn, who came out of a little summer-house near by.

"Oh! here is Guy," exclaimed Laura. "Come, sir, you were going to play truant and

we want you for our boatman this evening. We want to sail, do we not, Belle?"

Miss Evelyn smiled an assent.

"I am at your service with pleasure," replied Guy, throwing away the end of his cigar.

"A beautiful evening, Miss Evelyn!"

"Quite charming for a ride on the river," she murmured, in a low, musical tone.

Guy Fenton was a practiced oarsman, and he moved Mrs. Arnsdale's pretty wherry over the rippling surface with perfect ease, while the young ladies sat in the stern, on the padded seats, and watched the long, regular strokes. After pulling down the river some distance, Guy drew in the oars and allowed the boat to drift back with the tide, only, now and then moving the rudder to keep it in its course.

The three people chatted very pleasantly together and it was not long before Guy Fenton and Miss Evelyn seemed as much at home in each other's society as if, indeed, they had been old acquaintances.

Miss Isabelle Evelyn could converse upon most any topic Guy chose to mention. She had traveled in Europe, and had spent two years in Paris completing her education. So when he spoke of the masterpieces at the Louvre he found her perfectly familiar with them; and in fact there was hardly any celebrated place or noted thing she had not visited and seen. In music she was quite an enthusiast, and in literature Guy found her intelligence always on a level with his own.

Poor Laura, who knew very little about these subjects, and who was quite ignorant concerning whatever part of the world there might be beyond the limits of her father's estate, remained silent and listened.

She was astonished, and, perhaps, a little piqued, yet she did not show it, at the wisdom of her governess. She began to feel uneasy and to wish they were ashore. Somehow or other, as she leaned over the boat's side and looked into the calm and silent water, a cruel and tantalizing thought stole into her brain: "What if Guy should be bewitched by Isabelle Evelyn's beautiful face?"

"Miss Evelyn is a beautiful woman—a priceless pearl," thought Guy, "yet I am sure I can't quite understand her."

CHAPTER II.

SENT OUT WITH THE TIDE.

LEAVING these young people for a while, we will go back to a few nights previous to the opening of this story, and make acquaintance with one of our characters, as he sits in a boat floating in the East river, off the Battery.

There was a drizzling rain, and it was so dark that no object could be seen twenty feet ahead.

The man sat quietly in the stern, directing the course of the boat with an oar, as the tide impelled it along. Now and then the shadowy bulk of some vessel with its ghostly sails would start up very near him, pass on and vanish. The sound of steam-paddles, the clinking of iron chains, the creaking of blocks, the measured working of oars, and the occasional violent barking of some passing dog on shipboard would come to his listening.

Approaching the channel, near Governor's Island, where the current sets out strong toward the sea, he pulled in the oar, and, bending over, lifted with all his strength the body of a man from the bottom of the boat onto the gunwale. There was an indentation over the insensible man's left temple out of which the blood was oozing and trickling down his face.

The man paused for a moment as if to recover his breath, and then again leaning over he carefully examined the face before him.

"It must be he!" he muttered; "I can't have made a mistake—though the face looks a little too old for his."

With these words he let the body slide noiselessly over the side into the water. The ripples passed over the sightless face for a moment, dreadfully like faint changes of expression—then it sunk out of sight.

"This tide will take him through the Narrows before morning, sure," soliloquized the man; and dropping onto the seat he took up a pair of sculls and rowed up the river.

The rain was falling fast and the clocks of the city were striking three as this man, muffled in a heavy coat, with a slouched hat pulled over his face, hurried up the front steps of a mysterious-looking house in Prince street and gave the door a loud rap with his knuckles.

After some minutes the turning of a key sounded in the lock, and the door was partly opened by a negro, who looked cautiously at the man before allowing him to enter.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said the black.

"Yes, of course it is; why do you keep me standing here in the rain until daylight?" and he pushed by the negro and entered the hall.

"The missus been waiting for you this ere long time, Master Jem."

"Where is she?"

"In the back room."

"Is there any one in the saloon, up-stairs?"

"Yes."

The man, going to the further end of the hall, opened a door and a flood of light streamed over him, which, coming so suddenly from the outer darkness, caused him to shade his eyes with his hand until they should become accustomed to the change.

The apartment that he now entered was of medium size and luxuriously furnished. A fire burned in the grate, near which sat a woman rather inclined to be stout and advanced beyond the prime of life.

She looked around when the man closed the door behind him.

"Well?" she asked.

"It's done!" he replied, sullenly, throwing himself into a chair opposite her.

"For certain?"

"Yes, for certain."

"How?"

"Curse it," he snarled, looking at her savagely, "it's done! Ain't that enough?"

"No. Tell me, Jem Lash, how it was done?" she exclaimed, raising her voice in an angry tone.

"Drowned!"

"Drowned?"

"Yes; and sent out to sea with the ebb-tide."

The woman's curiosity seemed to be satisfied with this for she bent her head forward, so as to rest upon her hands, and stared meditatively at the fire.

These two persons formed a strange couple. The relation between them was mother and son.

Madam Devant, or Old Mother Lash, as she was sometimes called, had a pale, sallow face and greenish gray eyes, which, at times, gave a very fiendish expression to her countenance.

Her son resembled her very much, and as he sat in the luxurious chair with the firelight playing over his features, a reader of faces could have easily imagined him capable of any villainy.

The mother and this son kept a gambling-saloon in this house in Prince street, which, at the time we write of, was a popular resort for sporting men and "young bloods" about town. In this house many a fortune had been lost, and many a dark deed done which never had been whispered to the public.

New York city is a strange place, and strange things happen in it every day in the week.

Whatever crime had been committed on this dark and rainy night by Madam Devant and her son remains to be developed.

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS LETTER.

WHEN Guy and the ladies reached the boat-house, Mr. Arnsdale was there and joined them in the walk toward the house.

The moon was now up and the night was brilliant.

"Four abreast is a little too much for this path, isn't it?" said Mr. Arnsdale. "You shall

lead, Guy—you and Laura," and he and Miss Evelyn fell a little behind.

Archibald Arnsdale strode on beside Miss Evelyn in silence; a topic somehow did not turn up at once. He saw from the corners of his eyes her elegant figure moving beside him, with a little space between; he saw her features, too, clearly enough in the moonlight, and that she was looking straight before her, rather downward, as she walked, and very gravely.

"I want to speak to you, Miss Evelyn, upon a little business," he said at length, glancing ahead to satisfy himself that they could not be overheard by his daughter and nephew.

Miss Evelyn threw upon him a grave look of inquiry.

"Yes, a little business," he repeated.

"Very well, sir."

"Now, really, I wish you would leave off sir-ing me," he urged in a low tone, "unless you want to vex me."

There was no remark.

"I sometimes think, Miss Evelyn, you are a little haughty."

"Haughty!—really?" replied she.

"Yes, haughty," he repeated.

"Why?"

"Because you keep me so at arm's-length. All very well, of course, if I were a young man; but I'm not—I'm an old one."

"I'm very sorry; I hope I'm not haughty, sir," she said, in a contrite way that was very pretty.

"There! sir again!"

"You were speaking about some business, Mr. Arnsdale, I think?"

"Yes, so I was. I want to know—you'll really do me an essential kindness if you will—will you consent to help me a little with my letters, my accounts—in short, be my secretary?"

An enigmatic smile passed over the features of Miss Isabelle Evelyn at this proposal.

"I should be very happy to assist you, Mr. Arnsdale, but I think you would find me incapable."

"But you can write a very clever letter, and—I never pay compliments—I'm quite past that time of life—"

"I will try, if—if you will promise to have patience with me, and not be displeased."

"Displeased—I? quite the contrary. There, you need not look puzzled. I thank you very much."

And with these words, drawing near to her side, he took her hand and pressed it.

"Then it is agreed, isn't it?" he said, in a low key.

She laughed a little, and said "Yes;" and he thought she blushed as she laughed. Yes, she did blush; he was sure she blushed a little.

While this little talk was going on Guy and Laura had wandered some distance ahead, paying no attention whatever to those behind them.

"You haven't said yet that you were glad to see me, Laura," said Guy.

"But you know I am glad, Guy."

"It is all very well for you to say so, if you didn't laugh when you say it."

"Was I laughing?" and the pretty girl leaned lightly on his arm. "I wasn't conscious of it."

"It's very odd what pleasure you take—I don't mean you, in particular, but all of you—in bewildering and mocking us men. I never know when you're in earnest. You're so awfully insincere, and take such delight in it."

"If one's known to be insincere, one's incapable of deceiving any more, and nobody has any right to complain, don't you see?" urged Laura, ingeniously.

Guy laughed, and acknowledged himself beaten.

Mr. Arnsdale and Miss Evelyn now joined them again and then the party of four broke up.

Miss Isabelle Evelyn, going to her room and locking the door, sat down before her glass, thinking and looking all the time at her re-

flected features. She liked looking at herself in the glass. She knew that she was beautiful; and that her beauty was her power.

She took a letter from her pocket which she had that evening received. It was open; she was not now about to read it for the first time. Moving her bedroom candle near, she read it over again in an anxious way and her cheeks grew a shade paler than usual.

Twice she read it, and a strange, wild look stole over her features. Then she thought profoundly, then for the third time read the letter through, and turned round the back of the envelope, and looked at that, and so at last held it up to the light and burned it to ashes.

She sat on the side of her bed for a long time and fell into a deep rumination, and did not recollect herself until the chill recalled her.

So, with a little shudder, up she stood, shook her beautiful dark tresses round her shoulders, and gathered them into a few great folds, and extinguishing the light, laid down to await the coming of quiet sleep. But her head was full of all sorts of weird fancies. There was something in that letter which kept running in her mind and would not permit her to close her eyes. It was the words, "Drowned, and sent out with the tide."

CHAPTER IV.

A BAD DREAM.

A WEEK elapsed and Guy Fenton still remained at Albemarle Villa. When he left his office in New York he had promised to come back in a few days, but now business for a time was forgotten, and his only thoughts were of Isabelle Evelyn. Her presence to him was sunshine, and her absence gloom.

He, however, took great pains not to let his uncle discover the state of his feeling toward the governess by the slightest look or word. Because he had two reasons for keeping his passion concealed. In the first place he was not certain Miss Evelyn entertained any other feeling for him than respect; and in the second place he knew that his uncle had always desired that he should some day become Laura's husband.

One evening while Guy Fenton and Miss Evelyn were standing alone in the drawing-room, near one of the windows, conversing in a low tone, Mr. Arnsdale—whom they thought to be more than a mile away—entered unperceived.

He beheld them with a shock. Guy was holding Isabelle Evelyn's hand in his, and she was looking down, her cheeks dyed with a brilliant blush.

But a moment passed before they saw him, and Miss Evelyn glided through the window that opened upon the veranda in front.

Archibald Arnsdale stood stock-still in the doorway, a terrible expression upon his face.

Guy eyed him with a strange stare, but was quite himself before his uncle had half-recovered.

"I thought I heard your voice, uncle, and I wasn't wrong—just the moment coming up the path," said he, gayly. "Miss Evelyn came in to inquire for you. She wanted to know something about your letters—some instructions. She's your secretary, isn't she?"

"My letters—yes, she writes them sometimes. You both thought, of course, that I was still away," said Mr. Arnsdale, fixing his eyes upon his nephew and speaking in a measured way.

"I really had not been making conjectures on the subject," Guy replied, coldly.

Mr. Arnsdale said nothing more; he was aware that he had said something very foolish. He turned round and went into the library, at the opposite side of the hall.

On the middle of the floor of this room he stood for some time with downcast eyes and darkened face, not exactly thinking, but rather stunned, and with the elements of fury indistinctly rolling in his breast.

He walked to the window and looked out, without an object. A pleasant female laugh came to his ear, and he saw Miss Isabelle Eve-

lyn talking with Laura on the lawn a little distance away.

"I'm a fool!" he muttered, throwing himself into a chair; "that girl is deceitful; she has only been amusing herself at my expense."

As we have said, Mr. Arnsdale was a proud, vindictive man, and this little scene in the drawing-room had stung his pride to the quick. In truth, he regarded Isabelle Evelyn as his future wife, and, perhaps, he had a right to believe that she *really* loved him. He was now undergoing the agonies of jealousy. Moreover he felt mortified to think that, perhaps, his nephew had discovered his secret.

While in this mood Archibald Arnsdale's eyes happened to fall upon the portrait of his dead wife which hung on the wall directly before him.

For a moment he looked at it blankly, and then he shuddered, for he imagined there was a look of reproof in that sad, sweet face gazing at him steadily as if it would start from the canvas.

Nineteen years ago!—he remembered it very well—he had married Agnes Cresswick, a pretty, fragile girl. She had loved him devotedly. But *his* love?—where was it now when she had been dead not quite a year? It had long burnt out, cold ashes, years ago—gone before their first child was born.

"Agnes had kept him down in life," he said. "She had always been a dead weight on him. If she had been a different woman," he thought, "he might have won a higher place in the world. And there was Laura, a perfect copy of her mother—a pretty face, but nothing else—no mental force!"

Long he sat in his library alone and pondered moodily. Until, after having finished a bottle of wine and smoked several cigars, he fell asleep with his head resting upon the back of the chair.

Sleeping in this uncomfortable attitude, with his head full of the fumes of liquor and tobacco, it was scarcely strange if Archibald Arnsdale dreamed a bad dream.

He thought that he was standing near a large tree overhanging the ravine at the back of the house. All was dark and gloomy, and a stillness like the stillness of death reigned over the whole scene. Not a breath of wind moved the leafy branches of the trees, and the waters of the brook seemed stagnant.

He tried to move away from the place, but was unable to stir hand or foot. Some spell that he could not shake off held him fast.

Presently a faint glimmer of the moon pierced athwart the universal gloom, and in the faint, uncertain light a shadowy figure came creeping to the opposite edge of the chasm.

It was the face of Isabelle Evelyn.

The shadow looked across at him, and then lifting a white, transparent hand, with a triumphant smile, pointed to the bottom of the deep hollow where the filthy water lay.

He looked down. At first he saw nothing until the moon shone out fuller, and then there glimmered, cold and white beside the stream, a tombstone with this inscription:

"IN MEMORY OF ARCHIBALD ARNSDALE, AGED 49."

He awoke suddenly with a cry, and just then a sharp, light knock sounded on the library door. He was bewildered for a moment, then said, "Come in."

And in obedience to his invitation, the handle was turned, and the door gently opened.

"Good God! is it you?" said Mr. Arnsdale, in a wild whisper.

Isabelle Evelyn stood before him.

CHAPTER V.

A MARRIAGE.

MADAM DEVANT'S house in Prince street frowned gloomily upon the world by day, for houses, like individuals, have expression. Its front was cold, saturnine and forbidding. At night no lights ever gleamed from its windows, the doors were seldom opened, the shutters never unclosed.

The prying eyes of pedestrians, when their feet passed the limits of that somber building, had not the least chance of penetrating into its secrets.

Occasionally the postman brought letters to this shadowy place and a watch-dog servant always took them from him; no other person opened the door except the black man.

On the morning we are now going to write about, one of these letters had come and the faithful black, after carefully scrutinizing it for some minutes, had taken it to his mistress who sat alone in her back room, sipping a cup of strong coffee.

Madam was a woman not easily excited; hers was a cool, deliberative mind. Yet she was a little flustered this morning. First, she put too much sugar into her coffee, and ordered the servant to bring her another cup. Then she complained that this was full of grounds and quite cold, and it was not until the third cup was brought that she broke the seal of the letter, which, at sight, had caused her nervousness.

Laying the epistle on the table before her, and at the same time unconsciously stirring her coffee, she read, as follows:

"MOTHER LASH: You will undoubtedly know who this letter is from without looking at the end for the name. Yes, it is from me! And I want you to think earnestly about what I write.

"Arnsdale has learned something about me from a friend of his in Paris whom, it seems, he wrote to and made mention of me when I first came here. I cannot imagine who the person is, but it is certain that he knows me. Everything was progressing as desired until Wednesday afternoon. Arnsdale went out to walk but returned sooner than expected, and discovered his nephew in the very act of making a proposal to me. There, now, you are smiling I suppose, but it is the truth! You understand that it is my policy to have this nephew infatuated with me, because if it were otherwise he might be dangerous. Then, again, I desired to arouse my pupil's jealousy so that she would be reconciled when she found out the real state of affairs.

"Arnsdale was very angry when he came in and saw us, and he showed it, too. He shut himself up in the library, where he remained all night. When it was near midnight I went to him. He was very much agitated when I opened the door, and I couldn't make out whether he had just recovered from a fainting fit or what ailed him. I was about to explain the scene in the drawing-room, but he stopped me. He had received his friend's letter from Paris that afternoon, and without a word he gave it me to read. It was signed with the Christian name only. I think I could have made him believe that his friend was mistaken in the person if nothing else had happened that afternoon to confirm his suspicion. But, as it was, weeping and beseeching would not move him the least. He said that I was a perfect actress, but the play had now come to an end, and I must prepare to leave his house within a week.

"Well, you see, one card has been misplayed, but the game has not come to an end yet; oh, no!

"I have remained in my room all day, feigning headache as the cause of my seclusion, but, in truth, I have been thinking hard. The thought came to me at last—the thought I was waiting for so long. I don't know what suggested it to me; perhaps it was something that I read in the newspapers a few days ago. I have determined if I can't be his wife I will be his widow. Now, I hope you understand me. The Evil One put that idea into my brain—I'm sure he did—and I shall rely upon his assistance to help me work its accomplishment.

"Arnsdale will be obliged to go to the city to-morrow to attend a legal proceeding, and I shall manage—making an excuse that one of my friends is ill—to come to you on the same train. Until then as ever—"

"ISABELLE."

Finishing the letter, Madam Devant placed it away carefully in the pocket of her dress, and after imbibing freely of the stimulating drink beside her, she fell into a speculative mood, the drift of which could now and then be gathered from the various words that fell from her lips.

"She's the queen of hearts, that's what she is!" mused madam. "The men can't resist her—I do think she'll annihilate the whole sex before she gets through!"

Then there was a silence for a while.

"Such a head for contriving—there, I always thought Jem was cute, but he's a child compared with her!" and having delivered herself of these expressions, she seized the fire-shovel and began to mend the fire in the grate.

"But," she exclaimed, raising her head quickly, and pausing as if a new idea had flashed upon her. "But this man Arnsdale may live a long time yet. He's temperate and hardy—

likely to live thirty years longer. And that would give us a weary delay—a terrible trial of patience.

"No, no, no—thirty, twenty, ten years would be a long time to wait."

At this moment there was something in the sinister light of Madam Devant's eyes that would have struck terror to the soul of an observer.

That night, just after it had become dark, a hack stopped before the house in Prince street. A short time elapsed and three persons came out and got in. Then there were a few hurried words with the driver and they were driven rapidly away. The wheels rattled and rumbled over the pavements, the carriage rolled around corners, and along dark, narrow streets, the lights flashed in store-windows as it sped on, but the occupants paid no attention to what was taking place without, they were busily engaged in close conversation.

Arriving at its destination, the carriage drew up in front of a house in Fourth avenue, and the inmates alighted and ascended the steps. As the door was thrown open a flood of light streamed forth over the visitors. One was Miss Isabelle Evelyn—and her black eyes seemed to shine with a peculiar brightness. The man beside her was closely muffled in an overcoat and his face was quite concealed by the hat he wore. He raised his head and asked of the servant who opened the door:

"Mr. Dale at home?"

"Yes, sir."

They were shown into the parlor—Isabelle, the man, and a stout woman whom there was no mistaking to be Madam Devant—where Mr. Dale shortly made his appearance.

He was an austere, yellow-faced, dignified man, and his black coat, buttoned closely about the throat, together with a white neckerchief showed at once that he was a clergyman.

"I received your note, Mr.—Mr. Arnsdale," he said, hesitating and referring to a card that he held in his hand, "and have been waiting for you."

"I hope we are not very tardy?"

"Oh, no!"

"Is everything in readiness?"

"Yes, we may proceed."

Beautiful Isabelle Evelyn! Lithe and tall, a slight crimson flush suffusing her cheek and her long, glossy-black hair adown her back, rose up and placed her hand lightly within the man's she was to marry.

The reverend gentleman read the marriage service in his most harmonious tones and they were pronounced man and wife.

When the ceremony was completed the faces of the couple were rather pale and the manner of Madam Devant was a little flurried. Otherwise there was nothing remarkable to observe about this private marriage.

The register being signed the party bid the minister good-evening and went away.

Mr. Dale lingered for a moment over the book and gazed at this last record: "Archibald Arnsdale to Isabelle Evelyn, September 3d, 18—"

"A beautiful woman!" he murmured, and then closed it, soon to forget all about these names as he had many others written therein.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PEDDLER.

ON the following day, Mr. Arnsdale and Isabelle returned from the city to Albemarle Villa, but there was nothing said by either of them concerning the marriage. No one would have surmised that any thing unusual had taken place from any outward sign of confidence or amity between them.

In the twilight Isabelle and Laura went out as usual to walk under the avenue of grand old timber that flanked the avenue leading from the house to the public way.

Guy Fenton had gone back to his office and they were again left to wear away the hours as best they could in each other's society.

They strolled along for some distance quite silently. There had grown up an estrangement between these young ladies in the past week. Each felt it and knew that Guy Fenton had been the cause.

Laura Arnsdale loved her cousin, and her heart was sadly wounded when she perceived that her beautiful governess had drawn him away from her. Yet she did not hate Isabelle as most women would; she only felt grieved at her misfortune in not having the power over his affections that she desired.

This jealousy on the part of her pupil pleased and amused Isabelle. As the reader is aware, she did not care the least for Guy Fenton. She thought that if he discovered the true state of affairs between herself and his uncle before their marriage he might use his influence to break it up. So she meant he should be love-blind.

"You are not in your usual spirits, Belle," said Laura at length, feeling that this coldness between them must be brought to an end; "are you vexed with me?"

Isabelle looked full at her on a sudden with her deep dark eyes, and laughed.

"No! what makes you think that?" she answered.

"Your silence and your manner," replied Laura.

"Well, I have been silent, I believe, and I really don't know why; but my manner?" said Isabelle.

"Yes, Belle, your manner," repeated Laura.

"Well, Laura, I did not intend—I did not even perceive it—there, won't you?"

And she drew her toward her and kissed her, and then held her from her and looked for a moment in her face with an expression which Laura did not understand.

"Vexed with you? What a notion!" she exclaimed, with a sharp disdain. "What in the whole earth could I be vexed with you about?"

"I hope there is nothing, Belle, because you know I like you so very much."

"That's all right, my dear little girl, and very pretty; but it's not true—don't start—I'm sure you think it's true, but it isn't."

"I told you that I liked you, Belle," said Laura, a little hurt.

"But you *don't*, love."

Laura stared.

"No," laughed Isabelle, "you can't; how can you like a person you don't know, and one you can't know? There are things about me I don't know myself, and what I do know, you don't. Come, be honest, miss; don't we mystify one another all we can? do I know you quite? and how can you know me?"

"Well, you know best," said Laura; "I suppose we are all hypocrites."

"More or less," returned Isabelle, quietly; "you talking of liking me! No one, quietly another, unless they love them through all their follies, tempers and crimes. None of these have I shown. But how can we tell that your liking would stand that strain?"

They had now reached the end of the walk where a gate opened upon the highway. And here, leaning on the topmost bar, they saw an old man in the costume of a peddler. A broad, slouched hat almost concealed his face, and a long iron-gray beard drooped upon his chest. His garments were dusty, as if with the dust of many miles' wandering on the parched high-roads, and he carried a large packet of goods upon his back.

Laura gave a little start as she saw this man, and was about to turn back, but as Isabelle did not move she waited.

The man stepped inside of the gate, and bowing low, said:

"Your 'umble serv'nt, ladees. I've some very fine goods in my pack—if you please buy a little you help a poor old man a goot 'eal, yes, a goot 'eal."

And with these words he threw his packet down, and kneeling beside it, began hastily to unbuckle the straps that held it together.

"Come," said Isabelle, good-naturedly, "let

us humor him and look at his goods," and taking Laura's arm, she led her along to where the man was.

"Very fine 'sortm't, ladees, very indeet!" he said, laying open the packet, which seemed to contain every conceivable knick-knack known.

"I bring this shawl, and this silk, and this, and this, from Parees with me. Sell 'em very cheap, very cheap, yes," and the peddler held up his wares and waited for an offer.

"From Paris!" said Isabelle, smiling; "well, really, then you're an importer?"

"Yes, yes, zat's it, an importer. My store in Chat'em street, a very nice place, very indeet! My brother he tends it when I'm in de country.

"What are in those packages?" asked Isabelle, pointing to a pile of large envelopes with the words "Gift Packages," printed on them in bold, red letters.

"Zese? oh, zese be full of paper, writing paper—very goot. You have one, eh?"

"Yes, if they are not too dear."

"Dear! oh, no, no! only half-dollar."

She gave him the money and placed the purchase in her pocket.

"That is all we can purchase to-day," she said, as Laura and she turned to go home.

"Thank you, ladees, thank you, very much, for helping a poor old man," and he bowed again and again.

Then, strapping up his goods, he produced a dirty-looking little clay pipe and filled and lighted it while the retreating figures of the young ladies disappeared up the avenue in the deepening twilight.

Isabelle and Laura entered the villa and crossing the hall, now nearly dark, went into the room where they were accustomed to read together, and here the faint glow still reflected from the western clouds afforded them an imperfect and melancholy light, through the still open window.

There was something in Isabelle's conversation that had somehow frightened Laura. Up to this evening she had seemed always playful, girlish, like herself, but now there was a change; a sort of malign revelation had taken place. The young girl felt that her governess was mistress of a knowledge of the world which she knew nothing about—a knowledge that was not altogether good. She knew that Isabelle was the stronger and that there was an overpowering fascination about her which was hard to resist.

In an evil world the evil is the more potent spirit, and overawes the good. We instinctively feel this, and the first imperfect manifestations with which it hints its presence, touch the eternal antipathies of human nature with a frightful thrill.

Isabelle had studied her pupil and understood her nature perfectly. She knew that she was trusting, innocent, loving, and she played her part with her accordingly, when she desired to gain her sympathy.

"Laura, dear, at all events, you'll never hate me, will you?" she said, wildly, though quietly.

"Hate you, Belle!" exclaimed Laura, going over to Isabelle's chair, and placing her arm about her neck. "Hate you! how can you ask such a question?"

"I almost hate myself sometimes—I'm different from you, Laura; you can't understand me; if you could you would hate me also. No, don't kiss me; it is folly; you shall never kiss me more until I tell you all. I suppose you think me mad, but I am not—I am only a little troubled and I mean to tell you all about it tomorrow. And I'm no worse, not an atom, and no better, than you, than all others who act according to their circumstances and opportunities, and necessities. And now let us talk of something else."

About this same time Archibald Arnsdale sat alone in his library, smoking, slowly, cigar after cigar, with one foot upon the fender, and his elbow on his knee, thinking of that beautiful girl in the other room. Her image was be-

fore his imagination by day and haunted his dreams at night.

"A terrible spell!" he muttered, puffing a cloud of smoke from his mouth and a dark expression crossing his face. "I never thought it would turn out as it has; no, never. Great God! how could I be so foolish?"

The hours sped on; the night grew dark and the distant grumbling of thunder heralded the coming of a shower.

Mr. Arnsdale arose and threw the end of his cigar into the grate.

"I mustn't think of her now—I mustn't trouble myself about her," he said, impatiently. "I have my affairs to arrange yet, to-night."

He lighted a lamp on the table at which he was accustomed to write. It was a shaded reading-lamp, which made a wide circle of vivid light around the spot where it stood, but which left the rest of the room in shadow.

The night was oppressively hot; an August rather than a September night, and before beginning his work, Mr. Arnsdale flung open one of the broad windows leading out upon a terrace. Then he unlocked a carved oak bureau, and took out a packet of papers. He seated himself at the table and began to examine these papers. As he did so, a figure approached the wide-open window; an eager face, illuminated by glittering eyes, peered into the room. It was the grizzly-bearded face of the peddler.

After laying aside some documents he had read, Archibald Arnsdale began to write. He wrote slowly, seeming to meditate upon every word; and after having written for about half an hour, he rose and left the room. The peddler had never stirred from his post by the window. He had no fear of being discovered, for there was a curtain of thick green cloth drawn back to one side of the window which completely hid him from view.

As Mr. Arnsdale closed the door behind him, the peddler crept stealthily into the apartment, and to the table where the papers lay. He glanced at the contents of the paper, on which the ink was still wet, and the first words his eyes fell upon were these, "*—do hereby make my last will and testament.*"

He lingered not a moment longer, but hurried back to his hiding-place; nor was he an instant too soon. The door opened and Archibald Arnsdale re-entered, and again sat down to his task, while eyes, that had something serpent-like in their fixed gaze, watched him through the narrow space between the curtain and the window-side.

Very late that night, when the thunder-storm that had been threatening for some time, came down over the woodlands around the villa, and down the wild slopes and brakes of the estate, Isabelle, whose sleep was light, awoke. She fancied she heard a cry—a cry that seemed fraught with a horrible significance. And as she listened, with an ugly little frown on her pillow, an icy chill crept through her veins.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLOT THICKENS.

THE morning broke cold and rainy. The thunder-storm had raged all night long as if all the elements were let loose, and now the gale had subsided into a sullen calm and a drizzling rain. The autumnal leaves that had danced in such mad circles during the night, whirling up the columns of the precipitous ravine, now slept without a stir on the soft grass by the margin of the muddy stream that looked up to the cold morning sky with a surface as dead and black as if it had never been agitated. A broken bough, floating with its sear leaves upward, alone gave token of the recent fury of the storm. Over the cold wild landscape broke the dawn as it might over a field of battle; many a tall tree lay low, and great drifts of yellow leaves were huddled together in clefts and hollows, to sport on forest boughs, in air and sun, no more.

It was eight o'clock when Isabelle finished

her toilet and went down the staircase to breakfast. She found a strange confusion below among the servants and Laura was weeping bitterly.

"Oh, Belle!" she cried, throwing her arms wildly around Isabelle's neck. "Something has—has happened to papa, I'm sure—he's nowhere to be found!"

"Your father!—missing?" said Isabelle, with a frightened look and her lips trembling so that she could scarcely shape the words. "Nonsense!"

"Yes—gone."

It was true, Archibald Arnsdale had disappeared, when and where to, no one could tell. The last time he had been seen was about eleven o'clock the past night when he came out of his library to speak to Nancy Gwyne, the housekeeper.

The bed in his sleeping room was undisturbed, and in the library every thing had the appearance of the master having just left it. The lamp still burned bright and there were his papers and open letters scattered about over the table. The window leading onto the terrace was wide open and the rain had blown in, drenching the curtains and carpet.

After taking an observation of all these things Nancy Gwyne thought it must have been something very strange that had tempted her master out in the fearful storm, for gone out he surely had, and out of the window, too, as the rose-bushes beneath it plainly showed that they had been trampled upon.

Terrible indeed was the consternation which reigned all day at Albemarle Villa. Where was Archibald Arnsdale? What had happened? Had he been murdered? In such conjectures of doubt and alarm, what a magic mirror does the imagination hold up!

Various were the moods that lightened or darkened the soul of the governess through the long and dreary hours as those of the flying hawk above the wild and desolate landscape.

She dispatched the servants in every direction for information of the missing man and telegraphed to Guy Fenton to come immediately to Albemarle.

"Oh, Belle!" said Laura, who lay upon her bed with her face to the pillow, one would have said in a deep sleep, had it not been for a convulsive sob every now and then. "Oh, Belle! do tell them what to do, you are so much wiser than I."

And so the day passed without bringing any tidings of Archibald Arnsdale, and the evening closed over the gloomy house, and darkness succeeded. But there was very little sleep at the villa that night, for all were waiting and watching.

The time came at last. It was twelve o'clock when a loud and long double knock suddenly thundered at the hall door, and the bell rung shrilly.

Nancy Gwyne started up from her chair.

"Lord save us! It's the master's knock!" she exclaimed, hastening to open the door.

A laborer from the neighboring estate stood there.

"Is Mr. Fenton here?" he asked.

"Yes, my man," and Guy, in person, came out of a little room near by to answer the question.

The housekeeper held the light above her head and looked sharply at the stranger. His face looked pale, and seemed to forebode bad news.

"I think we've found him, sir," he said, gravely. "I—I think there has been an accident. Will you come with me, sir?"

Guy stopped to ask no questions, but seizing his hat he followed the man out into the darkness, leaving Nancy Gwyne at the door, struck dumb with wonder.

"Now, then," said Guy, as they approached a place out of her hearing, "tell me all, everything."

"Well, you see," began the man, "my friend, Dave Dodd, lost one of his horses last night during the storm, or, that is, she wandered away from the pasture somewhere, and

"we've been hunting all day for her. And not having found her anywhere up the road we thought we'd just drop down to Albemarle this evening and see if she might be hereabouts."

"Yes, yes," said Guy, impatiently, "but—but—"

"Well, while we were going along the edge of the ravine, just over there, Dave gave his hand a bad scratch with the brambles that hang over the side of the precipice, so he went down into the glen to wash it in the brook. And—and—"

"And what?" cried Guy.

"He saw it, right before him in the water."

"It!—what?"

"The body, sir; the dead body."

Guy Fenton gave a deep groan and leaned against a tree near by for support.

"I'm better now," he said, at length; "lead on; I'll follow."

And as the man went on down the steep footpath, descending into the glen with Guy Fenton close behind, he heard him mutter: "My poor little cousin, how will she ever bear this?"

The rain had long since ceased falling, and the heavens, although cloudy, did not wholly obscure the light of the moon, which being high lighted the opposite side of the precipitous amphitheater, and the peaked, gray rocks projecting through the trees here and there seemed to give the outlines of sheeted grotesques, with upraised arms, stooping from mid-air over the black oval of the pool beneath.

The two men at last found themselves at the bottom of the chasm. The place was the very solitude of solitudes. From a silence like the grave, from an abyss into whose depth scarcely at the highest summer noon does the sun ever peep, at night you might look up, through masses of wild trees and clambering underwood, to the glimmering face and moonlighted peaks of the precipice, and see the narrow disk of dark-blue sky and stars that roof in this solemn hall of silence.

The man mentioned as Dave Dodd was there with one of the servants, who had brought ropes and poles for an extemporized bier. They were seated on the turf like death-watches, silent and awed.

"Where is it?" asked Guy, nervously, looking over the surface of the brook which was quite wide just here.

"There!" said the man, pointing his long bony fingers; "there!"

It was not till Guy looked hard for some seconds that he became certain that the white object which he saw was a half-submerged human face, looking upward against that streak of moonlight, which, wavering and flickering in the shadow of nearly leafless branches, yet so sharply defined it, that there could remain no doubt in his mind.

Taking their stand upon a patch of sward on which fell a narrow strip of light from the moon, they got the rope in a long loop round the object which floated at the surface, and drew it slowly to the margin.

Slowly, with a sort of undulation, sometimes under, sometimes over the water, it glided to the bank. With hardly a word, spoken under breath, they drew it up, with a trail of water streaming after, and laid it a few yards on in the patch of moonshine. It was the tall, slender figure and proud face of Archibald Arnsdale on which the moonlight fell!

Guy looked down upon the familiar features with a deep emotion. This was the man who had been his benefactor—as it were, his father.

They took up the body and proceeded toward the house along the winding path, a silent train, while the wind chanted a solemn requiem through the forest.

Guy walked on a little ahead and found the entrance crowded with the domestics awaiting the news of their master, for Nancy Gwyne had communicated the words of the laborer.

"Come, come, I pray you go in," he urged, in an agitated voice. "You must not meet these—these men. Go back to the drawing-room, I entreat you, and remain there."

But the curiosity of women—who can suppress it? They were as though they heard him not. The next moment and Laura Arnsdale came out with a white face.

She read instantly the dark look in Guy's earnest eyes.

"Tell me quickly; you need not fear," she said, very low, in a voice thin and cold, that thrilled her cousin.

"No, no, Laura! do for Heaven's sake go back!" and he seized her hand in peremptory entreaty.

"Tell me the worst," she implored. "I will, indeed, try to be calm. Are these men bringing papa?"

At this moment a shriek—an awful shriek—burst forth.

Isabelle had stolen out unperceived, and lifted the covering of the rude bier, now resting on the steps. The rays of the hall lamp fell on the face that was underneath, and with a succession of low, hysterical sobs, she came shivering back to sink down on the threshold, her face whiter than marble and frightfully contrasted by her long, dark tresses.

"Oh, my love—my darling husband! Dead! dead!"

All present heard her utter these words plainly and distinctly, and drew back in amazement.

"Her husband?"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW PANE.

ISABELLE's story of the marriage seemed almost incredible to the occupants of the villa. Yet there was the certificate in black and white.

The servants whispered among themselves that they had surmised their master and the governess had been rather intimate.

"She used to be in the library with him a deal o' the time," said Nancy Gwyne, knowingly.

"Sure, she did," chimed in the housemaid.

"She was mighty fond of writing his letters."

"Worry, worry, and why are ye vexed?" exclaimed the coachman. "Isn't sh' a fine lada; sure, she'll trate us like a queen."

Guy Fenton contemplated these sudden, unlooked-for events calmly. His eyes were now opened; his beautiful ideal woman had grown mortal, and the charm was broken. He had been deceived; yet he could not exactly blame Isabelle, because now that he came to consider the whole affair—her words, her actions, there was a doubt in his mind whether he had not deceived himself. He remembered how strangely his uncle acted when he surprised Isabelle and himself in the drawing-room, and how he once spoke of the governess at the dinner-table.

But, if his uncle had really loved Miss Evelyn, why had he kept it such a secret? Had he felt ashamed to declare his affection for this woman so soon after his wife's death?

Guy knew that his uncle was eccentric, that he was impulsive, and he concluded that he had married this strangely beautiful girl on the spur of the moment.

Laura, in the meanwhile, was silent and docile. So deep was her grief for her lost parent that she could not fully realize all that had taken place. She knew that he was dead. Although while living he had been cold and distant toward her, yet now that he was gone forever it seemed as if he had been always affectionate, always tender.

Thus it is. Every face is sublime in death. The whole case is there; the weakness and the fate. It awes and it softens us. We see, for the first time, how much was excusable, how tremendous the penalty. The tale is told, to which words can be added never more, and it lingers still in our ears.

Isabelle had thrown herself at the feet of her pupil and begged forgiveness if she had done wrong, and Laura had laid her cheek beside Isabelle's, and entwined her arms around her

neck, and so the two girls wept together for the dead man.

The inquest was to take place in the afternoon, and while the preparations were being made the widow remained alone in her room with the door locked.

She was very busily engaged over a mysterious-looking paper which the "gift package" purchased from the peddler had been found to contain.

The paper had very much the appearance of a legal document. It was two or three pages of large cap, written in a bold, upright hand, nicely tied together at the top with red tape; and at the end of the writing on the last leaf a small seal was affixed.

Opposite this seal Isabelle placed a fragment of a letter on which the name of the writer was written in heavy letters. Then taking a brush and dipping it into a small bottle of liquid near at hand, she applied it carefully to the paper until it was quite moist.

"It is done! It is done!" she murmured, exultantly, as she raised the scrap and beheld the name copied onto the document before the seal as perfectly as if it had been written there with a pen.

"The lines must be made a little more distinct though," she said holding the paper up to the light.

The noise of approaching carriage-wheels up the avenue now came to her hearing, and she hastened to the window.

The coroner had arrived, and Doctor Harley from the neighboring town. The coroner was speaking with Guy Fenton.

"I suppose we can proceed at once, can we not, Mr. Fenton?" he asked, anxiously. "I have a little business to attend to at Irvington before dark."

"Yes," said Guy; "a number of Mr. Arnsdale's friends and acquaintances are here, and a jury can be impaneled without any difficulty."

So almost immediately after his arrival the coroner opened his court in the dining-room of Albemarle, and the jurors were sworn. He then told them what they each knew already—the nature of the inquiry, and the general character of the tragedy they were to investigate.

The first witness examined was Nancy Gwyne, the housekeeper, the last person who had seen Mr. Arnsdale on the night of his disappearance.

Then the two men who had discovered the body gave their testimony.

While these proceedings were going on the surgeon was in an adjoining room and made a careful inspection of the body.

The result of this was that he discovered the body presented the usual appearance of death from drowning; but close upon the right temple there was a wound which he gave as his opinion had been inflicted by a slung-shot which had rendered Mr. Arnsdale insensible before coming in contact with the water. He found also that the shirt-studs had been torn from the deceased's bosom, and that the little finger of his left hand had been broken in an attempt to take off his ring. The pockets of his clothes were likewise rifled of their contents.

What little testimony there was having been taken, the jury went to view the body, and, after taking a minute scrutiny, they arrived substantially at this conclusion—that Archibald Arnsdale had been murdered and then thrown into the brook, but by whom there was no suspicion. Probably by some one whose object was plunder.

And so the inquest was ended with the verdict—murder. And the coroner hurried away about other business while some of the jurors lingered to discuss the affair a little longer, and to talk about the strange marriage that Mr. Arnsdale had entered into, and to pity the young widow a little, and then at last to drift into a sort of every day conversation about the price of gold and stocks in a decent undertone, as people sometimes mention irrelative subjects at funerals.

In the evening after the house had become quiet and most of the occupants had sought their beds, Isabelle Arnsdale ventured out of her room for the first time during the day.

She paused at the head of the stairs to listen, and finding everything still she groped her way down to the library-door, and opening it went in. The room was dark, so she drew aside the curtains and allowed the moonlight to stream in. Then approaching a large iron safe that stood at one end of the library, she tried to open it, but it was locked. She, however, knew perfectly well where the key was kept, for, as Mr. Arnsdale's secretary, she had locked and unlocked this safe a great many times.

When she had procured the key and unlocked the safe Isabelle took a large paper from her pocket and placing it within, reclosed the iron door.

So far there had been nothing to interrupt her mysterious maneuvering, but now, just as she had completed her object and turned round to leave the room, her eyes rested upon the uncovered window.

A man's face was pressed against the glass staring wildly at her.

"Great God!" she whispered, hoarsely; "has he risen from the dead to confront me?"

CHAPTER IX.

WHO WAS HE?

THE bell tolled solemnly from the little church, which was almost hidden in the wood that bordered Albemarle Villa. Under the dripping rain the long procession of carriages passed slowly through the grand avenue, where the funeral plumes and the wet branches of the trees were alike beaten and tossed by the cold autumnal wind.

The dead leaves strewed the avenue along which Archibald Arnsdale went to his last resting-place, the dead leaves fluttered slowly downward from the giant oaks—the noble old beeches; the dead leaves were swept hither and thither before the blast.

Those withered leaves, that shrieking wind, that dark autumnal sky seemed strangely appropriate to the dismal work which had to be done that day.

As the carriage which bore the young widow passed out of the gates of Albemarle, a man, who stood among the rest of the crowd, was strangely startled by the sight of that beautiful face.

"Who is that woman sitting in yonder carriage?" he asked.

He was a man of medium size, dressed in rusty black, and there was a faded, withered appearance about him that made him look prematurely old. His face was marked by profound dejection like one whose life has been one long misfortune.

"She's Mr. Arnsdale's widow," answered one of the bystanders.

"His widow?" and the man turned pale.

"Yes, stranger, his young widow; she that was his daughter's governess. Why, by Jove! you're ill, ain't you?"

"N—n—no, only a bad headache—a nervousness that troubles me sometimes."

"I say, you don't know her, do you?"

"No."

"She's unknown about these parts," continued the man. "Nobody knows who she was or where she came from, exactly. And some say that the old gentleman was not murdered, but that he repented his marriage as soon as ever it was done, and so threw himself into the ravine of his own accord. But for my part I can't say. He was always a little strange though, was Mr. Arnsdale—a kind o' curious."

No more was said. The man in black followed the procession with the rest of the crowd, first to the village church, where the funeral service was read, and then to the family tomb in the cemetery.

It was while the crowd made a circle round this tomb that the stranger contrived to press his way to the front rank of the spectators.

He had stood there but a moment when Isabelle happened to look where he was stationed.

A sudden change came over the face of the widow. A dark shadow settled upon her brow and her cheek faded to marble whiteness.

No one observed either the man, or that change of expression in Isabelle's face. The moment was a solemn one; and even those who really did not feel its solemnity, affected to do so.

At the last instant, when the bronze doors of the tomb closed, with a clanging sound upon the new inmate of that dark abode, one long cry, which was like a shriek wrung from the spirit of despair, broke from Isabelle's colorless lips, and in the next moment she had sunk fainting upon the ground.

The hearts of the beholders were filled with sympathy and pity. She was, indeed, a true, devoted wife, they thought.

Guy Fenton lifted her from the ground and carried her unconscious form to the carriage, where he seated her; and Laura bathed her temples with water, which one of those near by quickly brought.

"I am better now," she said, opening her eyes and staring wildly around as if in search of some one; "do not let my weakness cause you trouble, Laura, dear. I—I do not often faint; but—but that moment was too bitter."

"Are you really quite recovered, Belle? Can we venture to have the carriage driven home?" asked Laura, kindly.

"Yes, yes, let us go home," and she laid her head back upon the seat and covered her face with her hands as if afraid to look at those near her.

So the mourners entered their respective carriages and the funeral procession moved homeward.

The will was to be read in the library that afternoon. For Guy, with Isabelle's sanction, had sent for Mr. Edward Thornton, one of Mr. Arnsdale's friends in the law, to come and take charge of his uncle's papers. The lawyer had arrived, and after a careful search had found this document securely put away in the safe in the library.

The relatives and friends assembled at the appointed hour to listen to the reading.

The widow sat calm and dignified on the right hand of Mr. Thornton, and beside her was Laura, while Guy Fenton leaned his back carelessly against the mantelpiece.

When all were quiet, Mr. Thornton, putting on his spectacles, opened the will and began to read.

Each one present listened attentively.

First there came directions about paying all the deceased's just debts and funeral expenses. Then he appointed his esteemed friend, Edward Thornton, lawyer, of the City of New York, to be his sole executor. And next followed the bequests. The first was one of five thousand dollars to his nephew, Guy Fenton, to be paid as soon as the said executor could make it convenient; and the second was the sum of ten thousand to his daughter Laura, to be placed out in good bond and mortgage, and the interest accruing thereon to be paid her quarterly, or in any way it should seem best to said Edward Thornton, his executor. The principal, with whatever interest there might be, to be paid over to his said daughter upon her marriage. And lastly, he gave and bequeathed to his beloved wife, Isabelle, all his estates real, chattels real, leases, chattels, money, rights, interest, plate, pictures, and estates and possessions whatsoever, not therein before bequeathed, to have and to hold unconditionally.

As the lawyer read this last bequest, loudly and distinctly, every eye was directed to Isabelle. She seemed to be a little startled for a moment, and then bowing her head in Laura's lap she sobbed convulsively.

There was a deathlike stillness throughout the room for some seconds.

"I—I do not deserve this kindness, Laura darling," she murmured, without raising her head.

Laura did not reply at once, but sat looking steadily at the carpet as if in a trance, and then, at length, she bent down her head and whispered in Isabelle's ear:

"It is right, Belle! You were his wife; he loved you, and so will I."

Unsuspecting little girl! So loving and lovable! So unskilled in the knowledge of a wicked heart! Already ensnared in the invisible web which a mercenary siren had spread over her!

Mr. Thornton now gathered up the papers and began to make preparations to depart. His business was done for this time, and he was a man that never delayed for ceremonies. He went up to Guy and extended his hand, and then bowing very low bid them all good-day.

"He would run up in two or three days," he said, "and commence the necessary proceedings for probation."

After the congratulations, *et cetera*, that became the polite company present, there was a general departure.

One, however, lingered, after all the others had gone. It was Guy Fenton. He wanted to see his cousin alone and bid her good-by. For some reason that he could not quite fathom she had kept aloof from him for the past two or three days; and she was now undoubtedly attempting to avoid him.

"Had she perceived his passion for Isabelle during his former visit? and could she have learned that he had been rash enough to make a proposal?" he asked himself.

He was walking to and fro on the veranda, waiting for the carriage to carry him to the depot.

That he had done wrong, that he had on one or two occasions rather slighted his fair cousin for her beautiful governess, he was well aware, and he was sorry, and meant to sue for pardon before going away.

But, Isabelle had foreseen this change in Guy's manner, and for some reason of her own desired that a reconciliation should not come about at once between this couple. So when the carriage stood before the door and Laura came down-stairs to meet Guy, she was waiting in the hall, and went out with her.

Guy Fenton was displeased when he saw this maneuver, for such he fancied it was.

"Good-by, Guy," said Laura, putting out her hand timidly and looking down.

"I hope we shall see you often, Mr. Fenton," said Isabelle. "You know it will be very lonely—oh, very lonely for us here."

That pleasant voice, that sad smile—was it genuine?

Guy could not understand her.

"Than—thank you," he answered, slowly, and a strange nervousness played round the corner of his mouth.

Isabelle's quick eye detected all this, and just as he put his foot on the step to get into the carriage she bent forward and laid her hand on his arm.

Laura, who had turned her head to hide her emotion, for she was thinking of the change that had taken place, did not see this action. It was done so quickly.

"Mr. Fenton—Guy," said Isabelle, in a low voice as he turned round, "are we to be enemies?"

"I don't think we shall be very fast friends," he answered, coldly.

"Be it so, then!" she said, defiantly.

It was only a moment of time and he sprang into the carriage and drove away.

While the driver kept the horses on at good speed Guy sat silent and thought earnestly about all that had transpired in so short a space of time. And his love! It seemed like a dream from which he had been suddenly awakened. It was not love; it was blind infatuation. Was Isabelle Arnsdale—how queer the name sounded—a good woman or an evil one? Guy Fenton could not settle in his mind an answer to this question. But, there was one thing he was sure of, that she had had complete control over his uncle, which no other person ever had.

As the departing traveler mused thus, a pale, white-robed woman stood at one of the Gothic windows of Albemarle Villa, looking out upon the woods, over which the moon now sailed in all her glory.

"Mine!" she said, to herself; "those lands and woods belong to me!—to me, who have stood face to face with starvation!—to me, whose life has been blighted in its very bloom by a wrong so cruel, that wealth and grandeur cannot amend!"

CHAPTER X.

AN OLD LOVE.

SEPTEMBER passed away and October came in, cold and cheerless. During the past month Guy Fenton had been working assiduously and had paid very little attention to anything outside of his law business. It was not until one evening, when he sat in his office all alone after the business of the day was over, that he again turned his mind back to the past and thought of his uncle's strange death.

He had never felt very positive that it was a murder although the appearance of the body when found seemed to make it almost certain there had been foul play. But these evidences weighed as nothing with Guy. For as to the wound on the temple that might have been done by coming in contact with some rock in the water, and the shirt-studs would naturally have been torn out by the first thing that the body scraped against. The little finger also could have been broken in some like manner. Yes, he was more than half inclined to believe that his uncle had purposely thrown himself into the ravine on that terrible night. And, again, he had made his will on that very day and got his papers arranged as the document showed by the date.

Guy leaned back in an antique arm-chair before the fire-place and stared meditatively at the walls. Dingy walls they were, and one would never have dreamed that under the coat of dust and festoon of cobwebs there were rich paper hangings.

The rooms which Guy occupied for his offices were old, and had seen many generations of lawyers come and go. He liked their quaintness, and had taken especial care to preserve their sober aspect.

A morning newspaper lay upon his desk in which there was an advertisement under the head of "Rewards" that he had read several times during the day. He now took it up and looked this column over again until his eyes rested on the following:

"\$2,000 REWARD will be given to any person detecting the passing of a Fifty-dollar bill on the Manhattan Bank, No. 1101—or for information concerning the possessor of a heavy gold watch, double cases, made by Tiffany & Co., New York, No. 201, with the initials 'A. A.' engraved on the inside of the case opening on the face.

"EDWARD THORNTON,
"No. — Broadway."

It was this that had recalled Guy Fenton to the past. He knew this advertisement must have been inserted by the widow's directions to her lawyer. The watch was his uncle's, and the bank-bill the coachman at Albemarle had sworn he knew to have been in Mr. Arnsdale's pocket on the fatal night, as he (the coachman) had seen his pocket-book when he paid him some money.

"So she hopes to obtain some trace of the murderer through these missing things? She means to avenge her husband's death?"

"Well, I may be wrong," said Guy, getting up and commencing to walk to and fro. "I may be wrong; perhaps my business is giving my nature a suspicious habit."

He stopped at the window and looked out. There was nothing particular to see. It was only a dismal prospect of chimneys and smoke-blackened walls.

"Yet it seems strange—only ten thousand dollars, and he worth so much!"

True, Guy Fenton, there are some things which seem so strange to human wisdom that no one on earth will believe them, and which

are yet the truth, revealed only to the unclouded eyes that look down from heaven.

"And my little love must be terribly jealous. I thought, if I stayed away, she would forgive me. But no, she has not answered my letter."

"I will wait no longer—I must see her and tell her all. Yes, tell *all*."

And with these words he sat down to his desk and wrote:

"MY DEAR LITTLE LOVE:—I want to come up to Albemarle on Saturday. May I? I cannot stay away any longer. I know you will forgive me and forget the past when you know how dearly I love you, my darling. You will, won't you? I shall come. GUY."

And after addressing this note and dropping it into the letter-box, Guy locked his office door and went home.

CHAPTER XI.

A COMPACT.

LIFE had passed rather quietly at Albemarle villa. Isabelle had been absent considerable of the time—visiting a distant relative she said—and had but just returned.

Laura remained there of course. She had never thought for a moment but what Albemarle was as much hers now as before her father's death, although Isabelle had taken the opportunity once, when a few angry words passed between them, to hint as much as that it was not.

She lived a lonely life and was learning for the first time what it was to be really unhappy. Her fair young face had fairly lost its beautiful color and her pretty eyes their former brilliancy. For Laura possessed what, perhaps, is one of the most fascinating attractions a woman can have—"laughing eyes."

Isabelle Arnsdale did not seem to Laura exactly as Isabelle Evelyn had. Yet they walked together, and sung together, and read together, just as formerly; and the people about Albemarle thought they were devoted to each other.

Laura had waited a long time, hoping that Guy would come back to her, or send her just one little word and ask her to come to him. But her waiting was in vain. So she became weary and sad, and would frequently steal away to her room and weep over his picture which she valued as the most precious of her worldly possessions. The picture was a small one, painted on ivory, and inclosed in an enameled locket that always hung suspended at her throat. It had been taken when Guy was at college and looked youthful.

One day Laura ventured to send her cousin a note. It was very short and only asked him to come and spend Sunday at the villa. She was a little proud and did not like to reveal too much to him at once.

An answer, however, never came.

"He loves Isabelle yet, and has forgotten me," she said after this. "And he shall see that I, too, can forget him. He has insulted me."

Little did she imagine that her invitation had never reached its destination.

Thus did matters stand up to the time we are now about to mention.

It was a beautiful moonlit night, cold and clear. The huge trees stood out in the mellow light like giant skeletons; the rushing of the water down in the lonely ravine murmured, as it were, in the quiet midnight air its dismal tale.

A dark figure suddenly appeared upon the footpath by the river's edge, and, after carefully reconnoitering, came up across the lawn to the villa.

There was only one light visible in the house and this was in the drawing-room.

The man—for such the figure was—crept along the window and looked in. There was no one there but Isabelle, and she was rocking back and forth in her chair, staring dreamily at the fire.

He knocked lightly upon the glass and she started and looked around. She seemed to recognize the face peering in at her, and imme-

diately went to the window and raised it cautiously.

"Come in," she whispered.

The man put his hand upon the sill and sprang nimbly into the room.

He was tall and well developed, with a pale, sallow face and flashing black eyes. His dress was elegant and apparently got up without regard to expense.

"Are you all alone?" he asked, nervously, as she closed the window and turned about.

"Yes, quite."

He helped himself to a chair and began to warm his hands before the fire.

"Well, what brings you here, Jem Lash?" Isabelle asked, unceremoniously, settling down in her seat again.

Jem Lash looked at her curiously and gave a short, dry laugh.

"What brings me here?" he said. "Why do you ask that foolish question? Don't you know what brings me here? It's for money, of course."

"Money?"

"Yes, money! Why didn't you send it as you agreed, and then I shouldn't have troubled you with my company?"

"Have you done your work, have you caught him in the snare yet?" she asked, eagerly.

"No, I haven't caught him and I can't find him. And, what's more, I don't believe I ever shall; for it's a dead certainty that he was drowned and sent out with the tide."

"Fool! coward!" exclaimed Isabelle, with mingled scorn and anger, springing from her chair. "And you have abandoned your work; you have come here to waste your time, staring idly at that fire. I tell you he was *not* drowned; but that he is alive and hunting me down like a bloodhound. Do you think my eyes could deceive me? Why, I saw him face to face at the funeral. You are a villain, Jem Lash; but you are a hypocrite. You would have the reward of guilt, and yet wear the mask of innocence, even before me, as if it were possible to deceive one who has read the innermost secrets of your soul. I am tired of this trifling; and to-night I ask you, for the last time, to choose the path which you mean to tread; and once chosen to tread it with a firm step, prepared to meet danger, to confront destiny. Will you grovel on in poverty—living on the gambler's luck—or will you make yourself possessor of wealth? Look me in the face, Jem Lash, as you are a man, and answer me. Which is it to be—wealth or poverty?"

Jem Lash cowered a little at this fiery speech and looked at the woman before him with awe. He thought he had never seen any one look so much like a fiend.

"It's too late to turn back," he replied, in a gloomy and sullen tone; "the dead cannot be brought to life."

"I am not speaking of the past," she said, with a dark frown; "I am speaking of the future."

"Suppose I say that I will live on in poverty rather than plunge still deeper in the abyss of guilt—what then?"

"In that case I will bid you adieu, and leave you to your gambling and—a clear conscience," she answered, with a mocking laugh. "If you do not care to grasp the wealth which might be yours, neither do I care to preserve our acquaintance. So we have merely to bid each other good-night and part company."

There was a pause; Jem Lash sat with his arms across his breast, his eyes fixed on the fire. Isabelle watched him with a sinister smile upon her face.

This man was a strange compound of good and evil. He was weak and vacillating—one minute swayed by a good influence, a transient touch of penitence; in the next given over entirely to his own selfishness, thinking only of his own enjoyment.

"And if I go on," he said at last; "if I choose to tread further on the dark road, which I have trodden so long—can you insure success?"

"Success? Why, there remain but two steps more and it is ours."

"Then I will go on. Yes, I will be your slave, your tool, your willing coadjutor in crime and treachery, anything; but mind you!—one half of the gains must be mine."

"Enough! You have made your decision. Henceforward let me hear no more repinings, no regrets. And now to the business."

"Yes, the plan."

"Well, first you will no longer doubt about having drowned the wrong man—for it's certain that you did; but you must search out the living, and when you have found him you understand the rest of the programme?"

"Certainly."

"There will be very little trouble to find him. He has tracked me closely for the last month, and kept me going from one city to another to evade him, but I have at last started him on a false scent."

"But won't he be dangerous even when entrapped?"

"Not in the least. The evidence will be too strong against him for people to listen to any shallow story he may invent; besides, he has no friends here to help him, and no money either."

"What next, after this has been accomplished? The other obstacle must be removed in the meanwhile."

"Yes, but you may leave her to me."

"And this will be the last step?"

"Then the estates and every thing can be sold without creating suspicion, and we will leave for Paris, where, if I can but once more step my foot, I will defy them all."

"Has this girl and her cousin met since the funeral?"

"No, and they must not, at all hazards, until things are settled. I intercept all the letters between them, and I mean that he shall believe she is trying to avoid him, and so stay away and let us alone."

"Do you think he has any suspicion?"

"No. But if he should see her—"

"Hark!"

Some one was moving in the room above.

"Make haste—leave me now! You know all?"

"Yes."

And the next moment he threw himself out of the window and disappeared.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE TRACK.

SATURDAY came and Guy Fenton went up to Albemarle Villa with a light heart, but imagine, reader, his consternation when he found the house closed and no one there except Nancy Gwyne and two or three other servants.

They could tell him nothing only that the mistress and Miss Laura had gone away to the city the day before, and would probably remain away for some time, as they had taken luggage.

Guy knew his letter must have reached Albemarle the preceding Thursday. He said nothing, but drove back to the depot and returned in the next "down train."

It was dark when he arrived in New York.

"Twenty minutes past eight," he said, standing on the platform and thinking for a moment. "It may not be too late yet. I will go down to his office at any rate."

And with these words he called a hackman, and getting into his carriage went to the office of an individual named Joseph Whitelaw, who occupied dingy rooms in Nassau street.

Twenty years ago the science of the detective office had not reached its present state of perfection; but even then in those days there were men who devoted their lives to the work of private investigation, and to the elucidation of the strange secrets and mysteries of social life.

Such a man was Joseph Whitelaw, or Joe Whitelaw as he was more commonly called. He was renowned for his wonderful skill, and his services were in great request among the lawyers.

Guy Fenton was fortunate enough on this evening to find the detective alone and disengaged. He was a little, sandy-haired man, of about forty years of age, spare and sallown-faced, with a sharp nose, which was like a beak, and thin, long arms, ending in large, claw-like hands that were like the talons of a bird of prey. Altogether, Mr. Whitelaw had very much the aspect of an elderly vulture, which had undergone a partial transformation into a human being.

Guy was in no way repelled by the outward appearance of this man. He saw that he was shrewd; and he fancied that he perceived in him the kind of a person he wanted.

"Mr. Whitelaw, I wish to secure your services immediately," said Guy, seating himself. "Are you at liberty to undertake a case just now?"

Mr. Whitelaw was a man who rarely condescended to answer even the simplest question until he had turned the subject over in his mind. He studied Guy from head to foot, with eyes whose sharp scrutiny would have been very unpleasant to any one who had occasion for concealment. After which he condescended to reply to his visitor's question in a tone that for him was extremely gracious.

"That depends upon circumstances," he said.

"Upon what circumstances?"

"Whether the business is worth taking. My hands are full just now, and I've about as much as I can possibly get through with."

"I shall want you to abandon all such business, and devote yourself exclusively to my service," said Guy.

"The devil you will!" exclaimed Mr. Whitelaw. "Do you happen to know what my time is worth?"

The detective looked positively outraged by the idea that any one could suppose they could secure a monopoly of his valuable services.

"You may name your terms, Mr. Whitelaw, but the work which I wish you to do, if once entered upon, will most likely occupy all your time, and entirely absorb your attention."

"That's business, that's business, sir—now you're talking. I like these single jobs, if they'll only pay, a great deal better than so many odds and ends of affairs jostling each other in my brain," answered Mr. Whitelaw, rubbing his hands with an air of gratification.

"You may state the business, sir."

Guy began to speak, but the detective interrupted him:

"Won't you please to sit over in this chair, near my desk?" he said.

Guy changed seats, thinking, perhaps, the detective might be a little deaf and so wanted him closer. However, this was not the reason. It was always a rule with Mr. Whitelaw to place whoever he was about to hold an interview with in some place where the light would fall on his face.

"Now go on, sir."

"There is a woman upon whose life I desire to place a spy," said Guy. "I would know every act of her life, every word she speaks, every secret of her heart—I would be an unseen witness of her lonely hours, a guest at every gathering in which she mingles. I would track her step by step, let her ways be ever so dark and winding. Do you begin to understand now what I require of you?"

"I think I do."

"Well, it is for you to say whether it is impossible."

"Impossible, sir? Not a bit of it! There is no such word in my dictionary. All you have to do is to give me her name and description, and leave the rest to me."

"Her name is Isabelle Arnsdale, and she resides at Albemarle Villa, some thirty miles from New York, on the Hudson river."

"Good," said Mr. Whitelaw, who jotted this down in a greasy little note-book; "I know the place."

"She was married to Mr. Archibald Arnsdale on the third of last September by a minister by the name of Dale, who lives somewhere in Fourth avenue. I want you to hunt up this

man, and get him to give as accurate a description as he can of the couple he married under that name."

"Very good, sir."

"This woman went away from her residence yesterday afternoon, accompanied by a young lady—Mr. Arnsdale's daughter—and I believe they came to the city, but to what place or part I have no idea."

"Exactly."

"Now I will give you their descriptions, and I want you to find them; and ask me no questions as to the why or wherefore. Do you understand?"

"Just so, exactly; I never ask impertinent questions."

Guy now gave him first an accurate description of Isabelle, and then of Laura, which Mr. Whitelaw noted down in the aforesaid book.

"And now the terms?" said Guy.

"One hundred dollars for finding them, if it should not turn out a difficult matter, and after that five dollars per day with expenses for watching."

"Very well, you shall have it. But you will commence at once—I mean to-morrow?"

"Well, yes; you must give me a little time though. I must wind up some of my affairs, and hand one or two over to other people; and I must set my books in order. I've an affair that I have been at work about off and on, for some months, and have just got the scent; so, you see, I mustn't let it slip."

The detective was turning over one of his books mechanically, as he said this. It was a large ledger, filled with entries, in a queer, cramped handwriting, dotted about, here and there, with mysterious marks in red and blue ink. Mr. Whitelaw stopped suddenly, as he turned the leaves, his attention arrested by one particular page.

"Here it is," he said; "the very business I was speaking of. 'Thomas Wheaton, murdered on the 5th of August, 18—. Then cast into the river to drift out to sea with the tide. His body found on the shore at Staten Island on the 7th inst.' That's a very clever game, you see, this sending people out with the tide, but sometimes they don't go—no, they don't go."

"I remember of reading about that murder in the newspaper," said Guy. "Do you expect to ever discover the murderer?"

"Well, I think I know him," said Mr. Whitelaw, with the careless and business-like tone of a man to whom a murder is an incident of trade. "You see, Tom Wheaton was a friend of mine, and I'm searching out this villain to avenge him. As yet I haven't been able to find him. I'll do it though—I'll do it, so help me God!" and the detective brought his hand down with force upon the book.

When Guy Fenton had descended the dingy staircase, and was out in the street again, he muttered to himself:

"If you have got a plot, my beautiful woman, I will have a counterplot."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BANK BILL.

COLD, gray, foreboding clouds hung over the great city all day, and as night closed in the light snow-flakes fell thick and fast. People hurried along the streets, muffled in their furry robes, rubbing their hands and ears lest the frosty evening air should freeze them. Some were going to happy, cheerful homes, while others went on, as it were, without any particular purpose unless to keep up circulation.

Among these wanderers there was one—a pale, haggard-looking man, very poorly clad—with whom we have to deal.

He moved slowly along from block to block, paying no attention whatever to those around him. At last he stopped before a store window and looked in. It was a drug store, and the red and blue lights streaming out over him gave his sickly face a frightful cast.

"I wonder would they give me a dose of poison?" he mused. "It would be a kindness. Great God! who would ever have dreamed of my coming to this—ragged and penniless!"

And she has done it all; yet I love her still. Yes, God only knows how madly I love her. Forget! Ah, what a mockery that forgetting was, when my heart turned sick to faintness at the bare sight of her! No, no, I can never tear her image from my heart, bad as she is. I would forgive her this moment if she would but come back to me. But she never will; and I can't find her. If—if I thought I should never see her again, I would kill myself this instant!"

And he placed his hand to his head and looked as if he were fainting.

He leaned against the window for a moment until he might gain strength enough to move on, then again started up Broadway.

It was very dark and the street-lights seemed to be struggling hopelessly with the wind and the drifting snow. It was a night for the well-housed and fed to draw round the bright fire and thank God they were at home; and for the homeless starving wretch to lay him down and die. Many hunger-worn outcasts close their eyes in the bare streets, at such times, who, let their crimes have been what they may, can hardly open them in a more bitter world.

The crowd dwindled away to occasional stragglers, the bells tolled out the hour of midnight, when the wanderer, drawing his threadbare coat closely about his shivering form, sunk down weak and exhausted upon a friendly door-step.

"Yes, darling, I hear you—I hear your voice. There, come a little nearer so I can see and touch you—oh, oh, oh! my head, my brain's on fire!" he moaned.

A man, passing by at this moment, paused and bent over the helpless one.

"My good man, are you ill?" he asked.

The wanderer raised his head and looked wildly around. The rays of a neighboring light fell upon the stranger.

"What—yes—did any one speak?"

"Are you ill?"

"Ill?" he cried, springing to his feet and staggering back a step. "I haven't tasted food for three days—I'm *starving*!"

"Starving!" exclaimed the stranger. "Here, my man, take this," and he thrust a bank-note into his hand and turned away.

"Heaven bless you, sir!" the man cried. "I'm saved, I'm saved to find her yet!"

He rushed on madly, he knew not where. His spasmodic strength, however, lasted but a short time.

"My God!—I believe I'm—dying!" and reeling he again fell in the snow.

"Hallo, Bill! something's amiss across the street," said a voice on the opposite side, and Joe Whitelaw, accompanied by a policeman, hurried over to the man.

"He's pretty near done for," said the detective, feeling of the man's pulse. "We'd better get him to the station-house as soon as we can."

"All right, Joe; if you'll help lift him up we'll carry him there quickly."

They took up the man, who was now insensible, and bore him along with some difficulty. The snow was beginning to cover the thoroughfare with a slippery coat, so that it needed considerable exertion to walk.

Arriving at the police station, Whitelaw and his companion laid their burden down under the glare of a bright light.

The man uttered a deep groan.

"He's uncommonly thin," said the detective, scrutinizing him. "The man must be starving. Hallo! what's this he's got clenched so tightly in his hand—*money*?"

Joe Whitelaw pressed open the closely-shut fist and drew forth a bill. He examined it carefully. It was a *fifty* of the Manhattan Bank of New York.

"Look, look," he exclaimed, holding it up, "we're in luck! There's a reward offered for this! The number is *eleven hundred and one*!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DETECTIVE'S REPORT.

On the following morning when Guy Fenton

entered his office he found Mr. Joseph Whitelaw patiently awaiting him.

"Good-morning, sir!" said the detective, as Guy paused upon the threshold to stamp the snow from his feet.

"Ah, Mr. Whitelaw, I am glad to see you."

"I suppose you've been expecting to hear from me, for some time?"

"Yes, come into my private room," and Guy led the way into an inner office.

"Well, if you can spare me a little time—"

"I am ready to listen to you for as long a time as you choose. I have been anxiously awaiting some tidings of your movements."

"Very likely, sir," replied Mr. Whitelaw, coolly. "You see, sir, there's not a living creature more unlike a race-horse than a detective-officer. We have to work and wait. I've been a hard worker in my time, sir; but I never worked harder, or stuck to my work better, than I have this last month or so; and all I can say is, if I ain't dead-beat, it's only because it isn't in circumstances to be the death of me."

Guy listened quietly to this exordium; but a slight, nervous twitching of his lips every now and then betrayed his impatience.

"Your news, Mr. Whitelaw," he said, presently.

"I am going to tell it, sir, in due course," returned the officer, drawing a bloated leather book from his pocket, and opening it. "I've got it all down here in regular order. First and foremost, about the marriage—it seems to be all straight and legal."

"You saw the clergyman?"

"Just so, sir. He showed me the register and gave me the best description of the lady and gentleman that he could."

"And what was that?"

"Well, the description of the woman was pretty much the same as the one you gave; that of the man—"

Here Mr. Whitelaw referred to his note-book.

"In height, rather tall. His complexion dark, his hair silvery. That is all the minister could remember."

"It accords with Mr. Arnsdale. Yes; without doubt it was he," declared Guy, gazing thoughtfully at the floor.

"The next thing I did was to take a trip to Albemarle Villa. Here I presented myself in the character of a laborer and asked for work, because you see, sir, if this young woman is playing any little game she mustn't have the least suspicion that a detective is on her track. In the character of a laborer I was told by the housekeeper that the missus was away and that there was no help wanted on the estate. In the character of a laborer I scraped acquaintance with the coachman, who is a sociable sort of an Irishman and very willing to answer questions and to be drawn out. I managed to entice him to the public house, which is a short distance this side of the villa in the village; and after a great deal of smoking and drinking at my expense he fell to talking about the absence of his missus and the easy life he led while she was gone. The substance of this conversation was that Mrs. Arnsdale had not returned since she first went away, and that he understood she and Miss Laura had gone South to spend the winter.

"But, that he was sure he had seen her at the theater in the city one night a few weeks back when he was enjoying a holiday; whereby he believes her conduct is becoming a little mysterious to pretend that she is in one place when she is in another. 'She was accompanied at the theater by a fine-looking young gent,' he said, 'and Miss Laura was not with her.'"

Mr. Whitelaw paused to take breath, and to consult the memoranda in the bloated book.

"Having ascertained this much I had done with this man for the time being," he continued; "and so, after leaving a person to watch the place and report immediately if either of the ladies should make their appearance, I came back. I have kept an eye to all the theaters, and searched New York inside and out to gain some trace of these two wo-

men, but, sir, as yet, with no success. You see, this city is like a great whirlpool and every one is engulfed as soon as they enter its boundaries."

There was a pause.

"Do you think it likely, Mr. Fenton, that these ladies may have separated?" Mr. Whitelaw asked, shortly.

Guy started at this question as if it were an idea he had never thought of.

"Perhaps they have," he answered, getting up and pacing to and fro. "But, where has Laura gone? Surely it is not she that is trying to evade me?"

The detective could not quite understand these remarks. He had no idea what was passing in Guy's troubled mind.

"Mr. Whitelaw," exclaimed Guy, with excitement, "if any harm should come to this young lady, Miss Laura Arnsdale, I would hunt that woman to the ends of the earth if it took a lifetime."

Mr. Whitelaw did not venture a reply, for he saw that Guy Fenton was speaking more to himself than to him.

"No, no," Guy continued, in an undertone, "it is not like my cousin to learn to hate me so quickly. This woman has some object in keeping us apart. Mr. Whitelaw, we must find them—we *must* find them!—do you understand?"

"Just so, sir. It shall never be said that Joe Whitelaw has been dead-beat by a woman. Oh, no, sir, I'm in this affair now and I mean to see it through. My reputation is at stake; and my profession is my pride."

"What plan do you propose?"

"I'll have to ask you to trust it to me a little longer, sir. I haven't tried all the 'dodges' I know, by any means."

"I will—I believe you are thoroughly equal to the difficulty of the business, Mr. Whitelaw," said Guy.

"I don't think you'll have any cause to repent your confidence," returned the detective. "And, now, if you'll sit down again for a moment, I'll tell you another item. But first, if I may make so bold as to ask you, are you not the nephew of Archibald Arnsdale, the husband of the woman we are in search of?"

"Yes, I am. Where did you learn that?"

"One moment, sir, and you shall understand. Your uncle was murdered?"

"It is believed that he was."

"Well, a reward was offered for tidings of a certain bank-bill and watch that were supposed to have been taken from him by the assassin, was there not?"

"I believe his widow offered two thousand dollars for the news of them through her lawyer, Mr. Thornton."

"Exactly," said Mr. Whitelaw, with a look of satisfaction; "now, as good luck would have it, I found by accident last night the very man that had these articles, dying in the snow."

"What! Archibald Arnsdale's murderer?"

"Just so," replied the detective, coolly; "he was starving and didn't dare to pass the bill or pawn the watch for fear of detection."

"Can it be that my suspicions are groundless, after all?" mused Guy, and then looking at Mr. Whitelaw: "Who is he and what does he look like?"

"I can't say that he looks exactly like a bad one, but you will have a chance to see for yourself. Mr. Thornton desired me to ask you to step down to the Tombs, where the man is confined, and identify the watch, as he believes Mrs. Arnsdale and Miss Laura have gone South."

"Then Thornton says they've gone South?"

"Yes."

"This is strange."

"Rather."

"Is there any other proof that this man you have imprisoned committed the murder than the finding of these articles upon him?"

"No, not as yet. This seems to be proof enough to excite the strongest suspicion, and he will be held for examination. He tells some

sort of a story about receiving the bill from somebody, but you see, sir, there is the watch—how did he come by that? His story is undoubtedly invented for the occasion, and a very poor one, too."

CHAPTER XV.

THE STORY OF A LIFE.

IN the somber, gloomy building where so many poor wretches have been immured sat the man the detective had arrested upon suspicion of murder.

The cell was a small, arched apartment, with whitewashed walls, with one narrow grated window opposite the door. Its furniture was a small cot, covered with a coarse white counterpane on the right-hand side, and a little stand and a chair on the left.

The prisoner's face was clouded with gloom, and his wan, haggard cheeks showed the suffering which he had undergone.

His garments were torn and tattered, and his hair matted and tangled.

He was a picture of woe and wanton neglect.

Presently the noise of approaching footsteps came to his listening. He sat upright, then arose feebly to his feet, as the steps paused at his door, and the chains and bars rattled.

A moment and the door was opened by the turnkey and Guy Fenton walked in.

Mr. Whitelaw's communication had so aroused his curiosity that he had come immediately to the prison to take a look at the supposed murderer of his uncle.

The man looked at Guy with his sad eyes earnestly for a second and then turned his face away as if he would hide it from view, while a tremor ran through his whole frame.

Guy, on his part grew a little pale as he gazed at the dejected looking being before him.

"Merciful heavens!" he exclaimed. "Is this Richard Desmond, my old college chum?"

"Yes—yes. Oh, my friend, thank God you have come here! There is some horrible mistake—I am arrested for murder."

"But, Dick, tell me quickly," cried Guy, seizing the man's withered hand, "tell me you are not guilty, that you had no part whatever in the crime."

"Guy Fenton," said Richard Desmond, sternly, "have you forgotten the man that was your bosom friend, your boon-companion for four years?"

"No, no; forgive me, Dick, forgive me! It is as you say, some horrible mistake."

"Ay, some diabolical plot."

"But, can you not give more proof? Can you not devise some way of identifying the villain who gave you the money?"

"No, none; I should not know him if he stood before me this minute, so closely was he muffled. I have told my story, which is looked upon as false, and all I can do is to trust to Him who never forsakes any of His creatures. It makes very little difference what happens. My life has been nothing but mistakes from the beginning, and the end might as well come now as ever."

"Pshaw! Dick, don't talk so. It is foolish to give way to adverse fate so easily. This is rather an unpleasant situation to be sure, but then, of course, you can't be convicted upon this evidence alone."

"The man that placed that watch in my pocket and gave me that bill will not let his plot stop here. He will carry it out to the end. I suppose the detectives engaged upon this mystery have been pressing him hard and he means to throw them off the scent. Mine is not the first case of the kind that has happened."

"But you can be cleared as to being the murderer if not as an accomplice," said Guy. "You can prove an *alibi*."

"No—no—I believe I was at Albemarle on that very night."

"You—at Albemarle!" exclaimed Guy, in astonishment. "I don't understand you, Dick."

The two men were now seated opposite each other, and Richard Desmond looked down upon the floor to avoid his friend's sharp, inquiring gaze.

Gloom unutterable gathered upon his face; his features fixed themselves into such rigidity of grief that they became more expressive than if they had been disturbed by passionate emotions; and over his brow collected cloud upon cloud, which deepened and darkened every instant till they overshadowed all.

"Guy," he said after a moment, without raising his eyes, "do you remember the day we pledged friendship to each other under the old elm in the old college grounds?"

"I do, perfectly."

"You were my confidant then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am going to tell you the story of my life since we graduated, not merely for the sake of sympathy, but rather for the sake of assistance."

"After leaving college I went to London, as you know, to reside with my father and study medicine. He was a very kind old man and indulged me a great deal too much. I had studied this profession but a year when I became tired of it and so gave it up, greatly to my parents' dissatisfaction. For the next four or five years I did not do much of anything unless it was to live as fast and wild a life as possible. I got in with a set of miscreants who led me from bad to worse, until my father threatened to disinherit me. I settled down a little after this. My finances were getting rather low, and I betook myself to writing dramas for some of the small theaters. I soon became associated with actors and actresses; and one evening I met a very beautiful girl in the green-room who was destined to be the ruling spirit of my life from that time. She was becoming quite an artist in the profession; her gayety and her pathos were equally catching; she held a golden key at which all the doors of the heart flew open.

"I will not go into particulars," he said, after a pause, "I will come at once to the point. I married this actress, blindly, without knowing anything more about her than that she was of American birth, an orphan, well educated, and earning her living upon the stage. We lived very happily together for nearly a year. I loved her with all my heart and imagined my affection was returned; but I was sadly mistaken. One morning while we were at breakfast a letter with a black seal came to me from my father's solicitors. I was aware the moment I laid eyes upon that package that something serious had happened. I broke the seal and read the letter while my wife leaned over my shoulder. It told me in a few words that my father had died and that my brother had been made sole heir to his estates. A few hundred pounds only were left to me, which would be forwarded at once.

"I was considerably surprised at this, and yet I had half-expected it. I consoled myself, however, with the thought that I would forget my poverty and feel myself rich with the love of my beautiful wife. But I soon discovered that she had not married me for love but for the wealth which I seemed to be heir to. After reading the letter with the black seal she treated me altogether different from what she had before. On the least provocation she would fly into a passion and accuse me of having deceived her, and say she had married a beggar.

"At last I became desperate and spent all my time drinking and gambling to drown my sorrow. I managed to support her very well on my luck, and she seemed to be becoming reconciled to our situation.

"One night, when fortune had favored me, I hurried home with my heart full of joy to lay the money in her lap. But she had gone and left me. A few lines of reproach, etc., were left for me, and that was all. I remember nothing after reading her letter—I had an epileptic fit—until I found myself in the hospital. As soon as I was well again I commenced a search for her. I found she had sailed for New York; and after disposing of nearly every thing I possessed, I raised a little money and came over here.

"That was last July. One day in September I met an old friend on Broadway—you know him—John Compton—and accompanied him to his residence at Irvington to spend a few days. While there I inquired about you and was told that a Mr. Archibald Arnsdale, whose residence was a few miles distant, was a relative of yours, and that you were believed to be visiting him then. So one evening I started off by myself to walk to the villa. It was about dusk when I arrived at the gate, and as I started to go up to the house I saw two ladies standing upon the lawn, one of whom attracted, riveted my attention. I stepped into the foliage near by and decided not to go any further. The ladies soon went into the house, and I could not get a chance to see the face of either one. I remained in my place of concealment until near midnight, hoping that the one I desired to look at particularly would venture out again or come to some window where I could observe her. But she did not, and when it began to rain hard I walked back to Compton's. In a day or so I heard that your uncle had been murdered on that very night.

"I again went to Albemarle Villa on the night after the inquest, not to see you this time, but to catch a glimpse of a certain woman there was in that house. The evening was beautiful, and as I approached the villa my attention was attracted to one of the front windows where the curtain was hastily drawn back. I stole up cautiously and looked in. A woman, whom I could not see very plainly, seemed to be bent down before a large safe, examining some papers. She turned suddenly, and I fled, ashamed of the part I was playing.

"The next day I stood at the gate as the funeral procession passed, and imagine my amazement when I found that the widow of the deceased man was my lost wife."

"Great God!" cried Guy, springing to his feet. "Your wife?"

"My wife."

CHAPTER XVI.

INSIDE OF THE HOUSE.

ONE night about a week after the interview between Guy Fenton and Richard Desmond, two gentlemen were ushered into Madam Devant's brilliantly-lighted gaming-salon by one of the "ropers-in" of the establishment.

One of these men seemed to be about sixty years of age. He had a slight stoop, and carried a gold-headed cane. He was dressed in black, had gray hair, and a very heavy gray beard and mustache.

The other was small in stature, with nothing remarkable in his aspect unless it was a long, sharp nose, and a black beard that completely covered his face.

The apartment was commodious, and with its voluminous curtains of dark crimson cloth, its velvet pile of Persian carpet, rich in bright and varied colors, its handsome oak paneling, quaint, gold-framed mirrors, and luxurious modern furniture, formed a picture calculated to please every eye.

Here and there stood green baize tables around which were gathered the card parties.

The room was quite full when the two strangers entered, and after standing and watching the progress of a game for a short time they took seats and began one themselves.

However, the gentleman with the sharp nose did not become so engrossed with the cards as to miss noticing every person that came in and went out. His glance was quick and accurate. He watched very closely a person who sat off at his right. The individual was Jem Lash.

Presently the door swung open and a lady walked majestically into the room.

She was dressed in ruby velvet, with a band of pearls encircling her dark hair, and she seemed radiant with a consciousness of her beauty.

It was Isabelle!

Nearly all the gentlemen in the saloon arose

as she came in, and one advanced to lead her to a seat.

It looked rather strange to the two visitors to see a woman in a gambling-crib, but the others did not show any surprise. In fact most of the gamblers had seen her there before and considered Isabelle as one of the chief attractions at the mysterious house in Prince street. And one or two came there nightly for no other purpose than to enjoy her society.

She bowed very gracefully and accompanied her escort to an alcove at the back of the room where they sat down a short distance behind the two strangers.

"Who are those two men?" Isabelle asked of her companion in a low tone. "I never saw them here before."

"No. They are down-town merchants, I believe, just dropped in to spend the evening in a pleasant game like the rest of us."

"Can they overhear us here?"

"Oh, no, they are too intent over their cards to listen to our conversation."

Then there was a pause and neither one spoke for some time.

"Are you going to play this evening, Isabelle?" the gambler asked at length.

"I mean never to play again," she returned, with downcast eyes. "I should not have come into the saloon at all this evening if I hadn't promised to see you, Hector."

"You are in a melancholy mood to-night, Isabelle."

"Perhaps I have nothing to make me melancholy! Have you never wondered how I became the degraded creature I am? Have you never marveled to see a woman of high birth fallen to the depths in which you find me; fallen so low as to be the companion of gamblers?"

"To me you must always appear the most beautiful of women, whatever may be the nature of your surroundings," he replied.

"Yes, the most beautiful!" echoed Isabelle, with scorn. "You men think that to praise a woman's beauty is to console her for every humiliation. I have long since tired of flattery."

"But, Isabelle, you know I am not a flatterer. You know I mean every word that I say—that I love you devotedly."

"Do not speak to me of love. To me such words can promise no happiness. You are aware, Hector Brandon, that I am a woman who never in my life cared for but two things."

"And those two things?"

"The excitement of the gaming-table and the love of your worthless friend, Hugh Haverland, who took me from a boarding-school in Paris, married me secretly and then deserted me to return to my grief-stricken parents."

"You never returned to them, did you, Isabelle?"

"Returned to them, whom I had treated so shamefully? No, never!"

"Yes; Hugh Haverland was a heartless man," said Hector, musingly, "but he is dead and gone to his account, these three years since."

"And rather a black account it must have been," said Isabelle, bitterly. "The misdeeds of a young and innocent girl whom he introduced into crime must have been recorded with his own."

"You really loved Haverland?"

"I did. I loved him as few men deserve to be loved—and least of all he. I loved him, although I knew that my affection was unreturned, unappreciated. For his sake I sacrificed everything, my own happiness, my own prosperity. Women are foolish creatures, and men do wisely when they despise them."

Another silence ensued between the couple.

"I am going away, Hector," said Isabelle, at last.

"Going away?"

"Yes."

"Pray where to?"

"Back to my old haunts in Paris."

"You are mad, Isabelle, to think of such a thing."

"But I am going."

As she said these last words a little louder, perhaps, than she intended, the two old gentlemen playing at the table a few yards away looked at each other with a curious glance. No one noticed it, not even the other men engaged in the game with them.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEMESIS.

THIS conversation between Isabelle and the man she called Hector did not continue much longer. He was called away from her side by some friend whom he had challenged at the early part of the evening to a game of whist; and she left the saloon, promising that she would see him the next evening.

Isabelle went up a flight of stairs and then along the hall to a closed door, where she paused and listened for some time. Everything was quiet save now and then there seemed to issue forth a sound something like a low moan; and then all would be as still as death until the laugh of some merry gambler broke out.

Isabelle's room was on this same floor—a little further back—and going in she locked the door and threw herself wearily down upon a sofa.

She might have been lying there for some time, for she had fallen asleep at last. It was no quiet, restful sleep, but a dreamful, troubled slumber, haunted by an uneasy sense of dread. So that when she started suddenly awake, she hardly knew at first that she had been aroused from unrealities, but was rather going on still with the thread of her dream.

For in that dream it was as if a rush of wild wind overwhelmed her, and strange voices called to her out of the tempest; and when she lifted herself up, sitting erect upon the sofa, she still heard the voices; though whether they called her or not, she did not distinguish.

Was it day already? For there was a strange glow through the heavily-curtained windows. Isabelle put her slippered foot to the floor, intending to cross yonder and look out; but she shrunk back. The floor was hot to even such a touch as that.

She brushed her hair back from her temples, and sat still for one instant, striving to recall her scattered thoughts—and then the truth flashed on her at one breath.

The truth—she sprang to the door, unlocked and flung it open, and looked down upon a wavering sea of flames.

Her first thought was to rush through them down the stairs, but she quickly saw that this would be madness, for nearly all the wood-work was already burnt away, and the smoke and flame growing denser every second.

She caught at the door dizzily, leaning against it, holding by it for support. The awful meaning of the death before her rushed upon her in full force, the hot breath of that death was upon her cheek. And a terror shook her whole frame that had never shaken it before.

Her whole life flashed through her bewildered brain in one swift pang. Was there no help for her?—no soul to remember her at such a time, in such a fate as this? Was she all alone? Had every one escaped, except herself?

It was while Isabelle lay sleeping in her dressing-room, some time previous, that the loud cry of "Fire! fire!" and the pealing of the bells had broken the stillness of the night. Then there was a wild scene of excitement and confusion among the gamblers below, and a rushing down the stairs to the door.

The fire had caught in Madam Devant's back room on the first floor, and had gained considerable headway before discovered.

The last man that started to leave the saloon was Jem Lash. As he crossed the threshold one of the men, whom we introduced in the preceding chapter, sprang like lightning before him out of the dense black smoke, as it were, and with his clenched hand struck the villain a heavy blow in the face, exclaiming:

"Hold! Jem Lash, I've a little account to settle with you!"

Jem Lash staggered back a step, stupefied for the moment.

"Do you know me?" cried the man, pulling his beard from his face and casting it aside. "Do you know Joe Whitelaw, the sworn friend of the man you murdered and sent out with the tide?"

With the desperation of a lion at bay Jem Lash sprung upon the detective. Then there was a terrible struggle. It was only for a moment of time. The villain threw Whitelaw bleeding to the floor and leaped for the stairway. In an instant the officer was on his feet again and dashed furiously after him.

Jem Lash had reached the front entrance and was making good his escape when a whip-like crack resounded in the hall, and he reeled forward, shot.

Not dead, though, for he grappled savagely with Joe Whitelaw the next moment. The detective now pressed his knee upon the prostrate man, holding him down while the handcuffs were put on.

The wild beast was caught. He lay upon the sidewalk writhing for some time, and then suddenly he grew quiet and looked up at the burning building.

His face became ashen, his lips turned white, his jaw fell, his eyes seemed to start from their sockets.

"See! see!" he gasped, with frenzied eagerness, "up there—she's locked in—she'll burn to death!"

"Who? where—quick, man, for God's sake?" cried Joe Whitelaw's companion, who was no longer the old man with the heavy gray whiskers, but Guy Fenton with his disguise off.

"There—right above us in the third story."

The next instant a fireman had placed a ladder against the wall, and Guy Fenton pushed forward through the crowd, and with rapid, fearless steps ascended.

Reaching the window indicated he seized the closed shutter and wrenched it away with a powerful grasp, and then stared through the glass.

"Great God! It is she—it is Laura, my cousin!"

The form before him tottered, swayed and disappeared from view.

"Laura!" he cried, beating in the window-frame frantically; "Laura, I come!"

He sprang into the room, now black with smoke; he raised her from the floor, and bearing his burden as easily as if her weight had been no greater than an infant's he again set foot upon the ladder.

The wind swept the smoke aside like a curtain, giving to the crowd below a clear view of the feat of peril which required so much nerve, daring and muscle.

The excitement was intense—the stillness of intenseness—as the multitude, with bated breath, watched Guy, clasping the beautiful girl, slowly descend.

As he touched the ground a shout as if from one voice burst forth from the hundreds of throats; but it lasted only an instant and then a horrible hush immediately followed. A woman stood like a statue upon the very edge of the roof looking down.

It was Isabelle. Finding her retreat cut off below she had made her way through the scuttle in the hopes of finding some chance to escape onto the adjoining houses; but there was none. The fire had reached the roof and the spiral flames ascended in columns. A cloud of smoke, black as Erebus and thick as Stygian wool, burst forth, and the spectators strained their eyes in vain to pierce it.

A shriek—a terrific crash—and all was over! The walls had fallen and the building was nothing but a shapeless pile.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE SINNER REPENTS.

IN order to comprehend how Joseph Whitelaw had discovered Isabelle's abode we must glance backward.

Immediately after hearing Richard Desmond's story Guy Fenton returned to his office and sent for the detective, to whom he communicated every word that had been told him; and he added his suspicion that Isabelle had been in some way connected with the murder.

A few days afterward the officer inserted in two or three of the morning papers the following:

"If Mrs. Isabelle Desmond, late of London, will communicate immediately with her husband's brother, Henry, at the Astor House, she will hear of something to her advantage."

Mr. Whitelaw's ruse was highly successful.

It was Isabelle's habit to look over the paper carelessly every morning at breakfast-time. She generally glanced at the births, marriages and deaths, that column which seems so briefly to epitomize the history of mankind; and after reading this column, half mechanically, at the best of times, she rarely omitted to look at those strange advertisements which appear under "Personals."

Thus it was that she saw the above notice. She read it through several times and her curiosity at last got the better of her.

She had no idea that there was any plot against her.

So, dressing very plainly and wearing a thick veil over her face, she went to the hotel to look at the register and see if any such person as Henry Desmond had arrived there.

It is scarcely necessary to say that she found no such name upon the hotel books.

The detective was on the watch and followed the closely-veiled lady to Madam Devant's house. Yet he was not sure that she was the woman he was in search of, for he had not been able to see her face.

Mr. Whitelaw knew the character of the strange house, and, accompanied the next night by Guy, he managed to make the acquaintance of one of its "rovers-in," who introduced them into its mysteries, as the reader remembers.

Laura Arnsdale had fainted. The excitement she had undergone had been too much for her overwrought feelings.

Guy bore her to a neighboring house, where he obtained restoratives, and after a while she began to show symptoms of returning consciousness.

She opened her eyes and looked around. No one was in the room but Guy, and he was holding her hand and watching her earnestly.

A vivid flash of joy spread over his face as he perceived her recovery.

"Guy—Guy," she said, in a low, dreamy voice, "has any thing happened, or have I had a terrible dream?"

"Oh, my darling! my darling!" he cried, throwing his arms around her, "never mind what has happened; it is all over now."

"Oh, I remember—it comes back to me. That horrid room where I was imprisoned so long, oh, so long! and the fire, and you at the window looking in."

In this meeting after a painful separation Guy and Laura had much to say to each other. She told him of the trap she had been lured into by Isabelle.

Laura had gone to the city with Isabelle, as she supposed to visit some friends whom she told her lived in Prince street. As they entered the house some one had immediately seized her and borne her up the stairs and placed her in the room where Guy found her. That was all she knew about the plot. She never saw any inmate of the house, only an old black man who brought her food to the room, day after day.

When the first gray streaks of morning lighted up the sky and stole into the room, Joe Whitelaw knocked at the door and Guy bid him enter.

"If you can leave the young lady for a while, Mr. Fenton," he said, "I should like to have you step down to the Tombs with me. You see, this man Lash is dying, and I think

there's some secret he means to divulge before he gives in."

Guy looked at Laura.

"Yes, go with him, Guy," she said, interpreting his look. "I am quite safe here, and can remain until your return."

"You will sleep while I am gone, Laura? You are weak and need rest."

"Yes, I shall be well, after a little quiet," she answered, casting a loving glance after him as he opened the door and went out.

Laura Arnsdale laid her head back upon the pillow, her face suffused with a crimson glow, and her eyes beaming with a look of deep, intense joy.

"He loves me, he is true to me," she thought, "and that dreadful woman has not succeeded, after all, in separating us. I wonder did she escape the flames?" and Laura raised herself to a sitting posture with this query.

"If she should find me here—but no, she can't imprison me again."

No, never again, Laura! The fetters of death are upon her.

While Laura was busied with the dreamy thoughts that were floating in her brain, Guy Fenton and Joe Whitelaw had reached the prison.

"No, Mr. Fenton, I won't go in," said the detective, as they stood upon the steps; "he don't love me much. You remember I gave him that death-shot. I couldn't help it though, I couldn't help it. I'd have done the same to my own brother if he'd been the man who killed Tom Wheaton. I'll stay in the office and wait for you."

Guy Fenton went to Jem Lash's cell with the turnkey.

The prisoner was lying on a cot bed and a physician stood near him. His mother—Madam Devant—had gained admittance and was sitting at his side bathing his head.

As Guy entered Jem Lash cast a frightened glance at him.

"Who are you?" he asked savagely, "that have come here to see me die?"

"This is Mr. Fenton," said the turnkey, "whom you wished to see."

"Fenton, Fenton, are you Guy Fenton?"

"That's my name," replied Guy.

Jem Lash closed his eyes and remained silent for some time as if in deep thought. He looked very pale, as though every drop of blood had been drained from his body; and now and then the expression of his face showed that he was suffering severe pain.

"That man in the next cell—who is he?" he asked, again opening his eyes and looking at the officer.

"It is Desmond, the man accused of murder."

"The murder of Arnsdale?"

"Yes."

"Take her away, will you?" he said, pointing to his mother. "Take her over to the window."

Madam Devant gave her son a strange, mysterious look and moved away to the other side of the room.

Jem Lash now motioned to Guy to sit down in the place she had vacated.

"My breath is getting infernal short somehow. Can't any of you help me instead of standing still and looking on? I say, can't you help me?"

"No, my man," said the physician, "I can't help you; I have done all in my power."

"My God! then I must die!"

There was no reply; every one present looked at the poor wretch in silence.

He buried his face in the pillow for a moment and then turning over he quickly seized Guy Fenton by the arm and drew him closer.

"I did it," he whispered; "I killed your uncle. He—Desmond—is innocent. It was I that gave him the money and put the watch in his pocket."

We will not give Jem Lash's confession precisely in his own words, as his sentences were spoken at intervals when the pain of his wound lulled and allowed him to speak.

It was substantially as follows:

Archibald Arnsdale had not married Isabelle Evelyn. It was Jem Lash she married, disguised so as to look as much like Mr. Arnsdale as possible.

The will was a forgery. Isabelle had given Jem Lash a full account of Mr. Arnsdale's property which she—as his secretary—was well acquainted with, and he had employed a lawyer to draw it. The real will which Mr. Arnsdale had made upon his last night of life Jem Lash had taken.

The murder was committed in this way. Jem Lash went to Albemarle Villa dressed as a peddler and entered Mr. Arnsdale's library while he—Mr. Arnsdale—sat asleep in his chair. He struck him a quick, sharp blow in the head with the butt-end of a revolver, which he thought had killed him instantly. But it had only stunned him, and as Lash started to leave the room his victim sprang up and rushed after him. Lash was near the ravine when Mr. Arnsdale overtook him and turning he struck the half-stupefied man again. This time the blow had the desired effect. The murderer took Mr. Arnsdale's money and every valuable thing upon his person and then rolled his body into the ravine.

The reward had been inserted in the newspapers so that Desmond might be entrapped and got rid of.

And this was the game that had been played for a fortune. A marvelous plot, indeed, in which the scheming woman and her accomplice had exhibited diabolical cunning.

Jem Lash had scarcely gasped the last words of his startling statement when he sunk back exhausted.

A few minutes elapsed and his brow grew as black as night, his nostrils quivered, his eyes grew glassy and became set in his head, a slight foam spread over his trembling lips.

"God, have—mercy—on my—"

Then there was one long-drawn breath, the smile stiffened, and Jem Lash lay motionless.

The mother approached. A cold chill went to her heart. She fell forward upon the bed.

"Jem!" she screamed. "Jem!"

There was no answer.

"Jem, Jem!" cried the old woman again in piercing tones, and she caught at his hands.

There was no response. She turned back and looked at those around her.

"He is dead!" she shrieked. "My boy—my son—my Jem! dead!"

CHAPTER XIX.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

THE winter was gone and spring had come. The great trees around Albemarle Villa, which had looked shrunken and bare during the past months, had now burst forth into strong life and health; and stretching forth their green arms over the thirsty ground, converted open and naked spots into choice nooks, where was a deep and pleasant shade from which to look upon the wide prospect, steeped in sunshine, which lay stretched beyond. The earth had donned her mantle of brightest green, and shed her richest perfumes abroad. It was the youth of the year and all things were glad and flourishing.

Albemarle Villa was to be a happy home henceforth. Happier, perhaps, than it had ever been before. A newly-married couple were to inhabit it—Guy and Laura.

Their wedding had been a quiet, unostentatious one at the little village church. And in the evening they gave a reception at the villa.

Among the guests were Richard Desmond—he had been released from prison the same day Jem Lash died—and Joseph Whitelaw, who rejoiced in still retaining his great reputation.

Nancy Gwyne was delighted, as were all the old servants, at the turn of affairs.

Laura looked very radiant and beautiful dressed in white satin and lace and pearls, with the bridal veil floating back from her

head, and the orange wreath crowning her shining hair.

Guy seemed to be as happy as possible and very proud of his innocent, pretty wife.

It was, indeed, a merry party at Albemarle that night. Lanterns hung in the trees all over the grounds, and some of the young people danced upon the lawn, where a floor had been temporarily laid down, until midnight was passed, and the moon was so high in the heavens that the glare of lamps was no longer needed to light up the festal scene.

The little that remains of this narrative can now be told in few and simple words.

Isabelle had squandered but a small part of Archibald Arnsdale's property, and the genuine will was found in Jem Lash's coat pocket after his death, which bequeathed the estates in equal shares to Laura and Guy.

Richard Desmond soon had news of his brother's death, and returned to England to take possession of the ancestral acres, where his old college chum, accompanied by his wife, paid him a visit a short time after. He had become a changed man, and his love for the siren woman was long since buried.

Joseph Whitelaw retired from the detective force after some years of success in the profession, with fame and considerable of a fortune.

Madam Devant's son had been careful in his confession not to implicate his mother in the dark plot, and so she went her way unmolested. No one ever knew what became of her.

We would fain linger a little longer with Guy and Laura, and show their happiness by endeavoring to depict it. We would show Laura in all the bloom and grace of early womanhood, shedding on her path in life such soft and gentle light as fell on all who trod it with her, and shone into their hearts. We would paint the joy of their fireside circle as in the deepening twilight happy little faces cluster around them, as they listen to the merry prattle of their children; but, enough! our story is told, and so we will end it here with the triumph of the good and the affliction of the wicked, which we think is generally the case in this world, though frequently it may seem otherwise.

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